



## TWELVE MONSTROUS CRIMINALS



# Twelve Monstrous Criminals

*from Nero to Rasputin*

A.D. 37 — A.D. 1916

by  
PHILIP BEAUFOY BARRY

*With 8 illustrations*

*"Quisque suos patimur manes."*

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## PREFATORY NOTE

IT is only just to the memory of the late S. Liddell Macgregor Mathers, the brilliant author of the "Kabala Unveiled" and other esoteric works, to point out that the original suggestion for a book containing the lives of twelve criminals of widely different periods and circumstances was conveyed to me by him.

My acknowledgements are also due to Mr. Hannaford Bennett, to Mr. W. G. Gillbee, and to Mr. and Mrs. James Sinclair for more than one illuminating suggestion embodied in this series of studies.

PHILIP BEAUFOY BARRY.



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## INTRODUCTION

THE study of the ways of evil men has an everlasting fascination for humanity. If one set out to describe the lives of ten saints instead of ten sinners, it is easy to believe that the saints would have to content themselves with their haloes and their respectability and forgo a large majority of readers.

The appeal made by wicked men is wider, perhaps, because nearly all men and women are potential sinners, clamped hard within the clutch of decent behaviour by civilization, by habit, by fear.

In this volume I have endeavoured to describe the lives of twelve persons who, during a period extending over (roughly) 2,000 years, raised their voices in the long litany of woe and cruelty that constitutes the most piercing sound in history.

These men and women, all of them, have found their apologists. The historians have contrived to find extenuating circumstances in the period—the environment, the hard pressure of political emergency. When we have finished with the historians, we come in our own day to the alienists and to the dealers in the atavistic creed.

“Moral imbecility” is the plea put forward by the doctors; the cave-man habit extending beyond the regions of civilization is the defence set up by the second group of apologists.

We are told by the first that the criminals of history and the criminals of the police-courts are simply moral imbeciles. They are not insane in the ordinary sense, but their imbecility is of such fibre that they rove in a nebulous region where they cannot distinguish between good and evil. One might describe them as metaphysicians gone bad!

The upholders of the atavistic theory take a more hardy view. The criminal, they say, is not insane nor is he imbecile. In him there survive those instincts which drove primitive man from the cave to fight wild beasts—to snatch food for wife and children. Sleek civilization after a million or two years has thrust the cave-man into a black coat and inconspicuous tie, but has left the ape and the tiger ready to spring and destroy.

These two theories are fashionable to-day. To-morrow or the day after, it is conceivable that there may be others equally plausible. Perhaps they in their turn will be discredited, sharing ultimately the fate of the Lombroso theory. Cesare Lombroso, as we are aware, held the belief that the professional criminal is wholly or partly a mental and physical degenerate. Recent investigations and experiments, however, have sufficiently demonstrated the fact that the average breaker-of-laws is, in the majority of cases, only a fraction below the law-abiding citizen in point of bodily and mental health.

Let the writer add one more theory, and let him add it at the risk of being called mediæval-minded, superstitious, absurd—what you will. Let him suggest that there is the possibility that

the explanation of the criminal brain and heart goes deeper than the scientific student will permit. Is it not conceivable that there may be an objective force of evil—a force inscrutable, elusive, as the life essence itself?

The twelve criminals whose acts are set down in these pages form a queer and perhaps incongruous assembly. To write of Nero and Charles Peace—of Elizabeth Brownrigg and Francesco Cenci within the compass of a single volume, will at first sight seem an act of indiscretion. But the thing is done deliberately, nor is the incongruity as lurid as the first glimpse suggests. For let it be remembered that the essential, the dominating elements of character, were more or less identical in each case. Egotism and the complete absence of the spirit of pity worked their way with Nero in his palace and with Elizabeth Brownrigg in her London slum.

The criminal is a gambler. He not only takes a risk, but he loves the taking of it. Moreover, his deep and stultifying egotism convinces him that he will escape detection.

One imagines, too, that he is something of a Determinist. He believes in what he calls "Fate". Perhaps it is that creed which holds him cool and aloof in the dock whilst the judge sentences him to death. He is positive that his "star" will not fail him—he will escape the rope after all.

I am well aware that in a work of this kind, a writer many times more competent might fail to present his characters faithfully in such guise

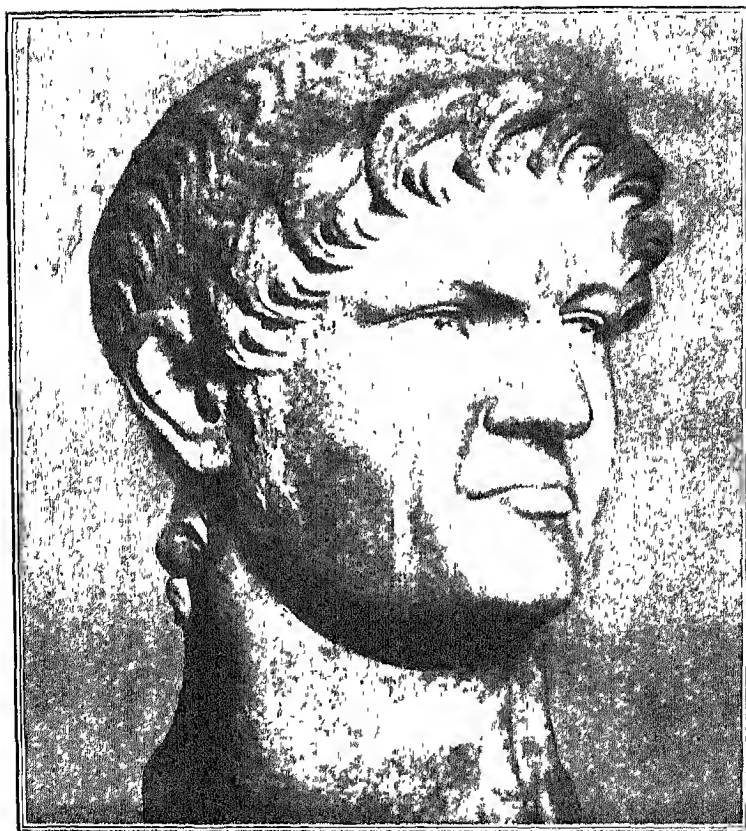


that they who read shall go below the skin and penetrate the hearts and brains of these strange people. I have tried, however, to visualize the characters as an actor visualizes his parts. I have attempted to throw at least one gleam across the jungle of their lives.

PHILIP BEAUFOY BARRY.

LONDON, *September*, 1927.





NERO CLAUDIUS CÆSAR

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A.D. 37-68



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A.D. 37-68

THE stage of Roman civilization was perfectly set for the arrival of Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, afterwards called Nero Claudius Cæsar. Indeed, the general condition of society was precisely the condition to call forth such a man.

From the time of their first close intercourse with Greece, the Romans had entered into a state of partial degeneracy—a state which, perhaps, held the first seeds of dissolution. Every soft and voluptuous art—in addition to the more hardy art of lying—had been acquired from Hellenic influences.

Morality was laughed at—the ancient rigid principles were held in scorn. Whereas for more than five hundred years the Romans had held family life the most sacred of institutions, they now regarded marriage with good-natured contempt. Divorce was frequent as in certain American States to-day. It had become a sort of stock joke. Comedians worked their quips upon it. The husband and wife who respected

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any kind of moral conventions were looked upon as old-fashioned, absurd.

Eloquence in the real sense was dead. In its place a windy rhetoric flourished in the Senate and the Forum. Artificiality and affectation were the keynotes of speech as they were the keynotes of life itself on that morning when Nero came into the world.

The drama likewise was degenerate. The tragedies of the poets were shelved. Spectacular shows and pantomimes held the stages. There was a craze for debased realism (frequently an accompaniment of an artificial age), which took the peculiar form of engaging condemned criminals to play certain parts so that they might be genuinely destroyed. Thus, Icarus, attempting to fly, had to fall from a great height and be dashed to pieces on the stage! The felon-actor who played Hercules had to be burned to death in sight of the audience on the funeral pyre. Actors were crucified if crucifixion happened in the play—mangled by bears if the stage-directions ordered such torments.

Whilst the richer people lounged and debauched in the theatres, the multitudes—the long-suffering proletariat, as we call them to-day—gorged themselves with buffooneries in the circus and brutalities in the arena.

Religion was in a nebulous state—vague, incoherent. There, too, indifference held the high place. The upper classes openly ridiculed the gods whom their ancestors had worshipped. They had no religion except a bastard Theogony (a sort of fatalism derived from certain Greek philosophers). On the other hand, the plebeians

still professed to hold the Pagan deities in some repute, but at the same time welcomed strange gods from other lands. A debased form of Judaism was professed by some. It is possible (and the suggestion is put forward without any attempt at flippancy) the idea of being constrained to remember only one deity in place of many appealed to minds that had become lethargic and utterly, if not entirely, comatose.

In the background, hidden in cavernous places or in tiny remote churches, Christianity was struggling to put forth its first green shoots. There was growing the tree that in the fullness of time was to spread its merciful shade over the entire Western world.

It was into this Rome and into this civilization that he who afterwards was called Nero was born on the 15th day of December, A.D. 37.

The dice of destiny were heavily loaded against Nero from the beginning. His parentage was as evil as one could conceive. His father, Lucius Ahenobarbus, a Roman of some rank, was a man of diabolical temper. Among his more notable feats was the crushing to death under his chariot wheels of a boy who had stumbled in the road. During an absurdly trivial quarrel, he struck out the eyes of an opponent.

Agrippina, his wife, was a fitting mate for this amiable person. Obsessed by egotism and ambition, she was cold-blooded, callous, resolute. From the moment that Nero as a babe first lay in her arms, she had probably conceived the



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idea that some day he might be thrust upon the throne of the Cæsars.

It was the urge of this ambition that drove her soon after the death of Messalina (her own admirable partner having meantime conveniently departed from the world) to prevail upon Claudius to make her his wife. The Emperor fell a victim to her fascinations, and the marriage took place with great ceremonial.

The adoption of the young Lucius soon followed. Agrippina, having secured this end, set herself to arrange that Britannicus, the son of Claudius and Messalina, should be rigidly kept in the background.

Nero and Agrippina ! Mother and son ! Lovers of each other in the beginning—then haters both—fellow-schemers in many evil schemes—and at last victim and murderer. The fierce light of history might well be shaded a little before it glares on these two monstrous creatures who trod the stage of empire nineteen hundred years ago. Yet let the history be written ever so leniently, the record will be sufficiently horrible. . . .

The initial years of the life of the young Lucius Ahenobarbus were spent in the house of his aunt Lepida, for at that time his mother had incurred Imperial displeasure and was living in banishment. He received his baby training at the hands of a slave barber and a slave dancer.

His horoscope at birth had been evil. It is said that his father, on hearing the astrologer's verdict, at once hazarded a jest. It was hardly

probable, he hinted, that any good could come of a child born of his wife and of himself.

It is possible that those early years spent in the society of barber and dancer may have influenced the boy's character in a direction hardly favourable to its development.

Later, he came under the tuition of Seneca, but the scope of his education was limited by the fact that Agrippina forbade the study of philosophy, on the ground that it was a useless study for a potential emperor, if not a positively damaging process. It is conceivable, however, that had Seneca been permitted to implant the principles of Stoic creed, he would not have found a responsive pupil.

The youthful beauty of the boy was very remarkable. People came from distant places to gaze upon those wondrous features which, in later years, grew gross and hideous. One imagines that his vanity was stirred by this homage—the overwhelming vanity that stood by him to life's last hour.

So the years passed. Meantime, the marriage of Claudius, the blasé, played-out profligate, was anything but an ideal affair. There were frequent quarrels, and it became abundantly clear to the woman that her emperor was growing weary.

There came the day at length when Agrippina resolved to drive matters to a crisis. Desperately fearful lest Claudius should discard her son in favour of Britannicus, she took a course entirely characteristic of desperate women in those times.

In a certain prison lay a professional female

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poisoner called Locusta. This woman was immediately taken from gaol. Her freedom was assured her on a certain condition. She was to prepare a poison which might be administered to the Emperor during a meal.

Locusta seems to have entered into the scheme with professional enthusiasm. Probably she realized that the poisoning of Imperial personages was an event of some importance, and she resolved that the thing should be done with complete artistry. She concocted a subtle drug, which a little later was introduced into a dish of mushrooms—a dish that Claudius especially enjoyed.

The wretched man went to dinner unsuspectingly enough. Immediately after swallowing the mushrooms he was seized with violent sickness. Agrippina had a doctor in readiness, for she was a woman who took no risks. The doctor was in her secret and in her pay. When the dying man showed some faint sign of rallying, the physician finished the horrible business by tickling his throat with a poisoned feather.

The instant the breath had quitted the body of her husband the swift and businesslike Agrippina perceived that there was no time to be lost. In those days the question of a successor to a dead ruler was a species of gamble—sometimes it depended on a whim of the Senate, a sudden fancy of the soldiery. Terrified lest Britannicus should be chosen, she decided that her son should go forth immediately to the Forum on the grounds that he had been officially named by Claudius as his successor.

And so it came about that within a few hours

of the death of Claudius, Nero walked through the gates of the palace on his way to the Forum. He was accompanied by Burrus, the præfect of the Pretorian Guards, who announced to his subordinates that Nero had been chosen for their new Emperor.

Arrived at the Forum, Nero made an excellent speech. He gave the soldiery their donative and was invested with all the honours of Imperial rank except one. He declined to be called "Pater Patriæ". He suggested that he was too young, his age being at that time seventeen. It is possible, however, that his vanity rebelled against so solemn a name as "father".

After this ceremony, Nero proceeded to give a very elaborate funeral to the dead Claudius. The fact that one had aided in the dispatch of a man did not in those times signify that it would be a breach of good taste to bestow on him some post-mortem honours.

Perhaps one of the most amazing facts in the brief and terrible history of Nero is the fact that the first five years of his reign saw a just, well-governed empire. Indeed, Trajan, speaking of that period many years later, held the opinion that Nero showed himself to be an ideal ruler.

How came this? One explanation may lie in the fact that in those initial years he was largely aided in his conduct by Seneca, the wise Stoic, and Burrus, the Pretorian præfect, both of them humane and excellent men.

Not only was Nero at that time an admirable

ruler—he even showed a remarkable kindness and clemency. It is recorded that frequently when compelled to sign a death-warrant he would sigh bitterly and exclaim: “Would that I had never learned to write!” One can hardly attribute this tendency to hypocrisy—to a desire to win favour. Whatever the crimes of Nero, hypocrisy did not form one of his minor faults. Moreover, there was no necessity for such pretences.

Long since, however, he had shown a decided tendency towards the frivolous rather than towards the serious side of existence. As a child he had found his chief delight in taking part in the circus games. He adored singing, acting, any kind of art wherein he could display himself and win the immediate applause of the multitude. One imagines that the more silent arts of literature and poetry would not have appealed to him. He had to *hear* the applause—not merely to see it written down.

Whilst, however, his public behaviour in regard to government was quite admirable during those first five years, his private behaviour was by no means as praiseworthy. Married to Octavia, daughter of a senator of high rank, a woman far too good to be the wife of such a trifler, he soon neglected her and formed an amazingly violent attachment to Acte, a freed-woman of enormous beauty.

Meantime, he was exhibiting signs of sportive violence, a sort of prelude to the orgy of bloodshed that was yet to come. He would go forth at night on foolish and savage adventures. He would knock men’s heads together—inflict sly

kicks on their shins—sometimes wound them more or less severely. He would rifle the shops, stealing gold and silver ornaments, which were afterwards sold by auction in the palace. Once, on a midnight excursion of the sort, he came near to being beaten to death by a senator who did not know the Emperor in his disguise, but who knew quite well that he had tried to seduce his wife. After that incident, Nero (whose physical courage was never a leading characteristic) did not issue forth without a secret escort.

On certain occasions he would sing in the theatres, utterly disgusting the more decent-minded citizens, of whom a few still remained in degenerate Rome. Public performers did not hold the place in the esteem of society in the first century that they cherish so proudly to-day. Usually the mark of the slave was on all of them that sang, danced, or acted. To behold an Emperor vying with slave-mummers for applause was a spectacle horrifying to some, amusing to others, but entirely novel to all.

It must have been something of an ordeal (apart from its merits or demerits as an artistic performance) when Nero sang in the theatre. For a strict edict was posted to the effect that no man or woman might stir from the building whilst the Imperial voice was raised. There were sometimes strange and rather disconcerting incidents. More than once a woman about to have a child found herself delivered of her offspring during a Neronian cadence. Probably, however, she preferred that inconvenience to the probable fate that would have awaited her had she dared to go!

Imagine the scene! The stricken woman, torn with physical agony and mental fear, held fast to her place, without aid or comfort because the Imperial mummer was intoning his interminable songs. The tyranny was trivial, perhaps, compared with later tyrannies, but it showed plainly the direction in which the diseased vanity was tending.

The prelude to the organized campaign of murder that followed in the later period was occupied with many crimes of what we should call an immoral nature. It is true that ancient races, especially the Hellenic races, held a certain unnatural vice if not in esteem at least in tolerance. It was condoned, moreover, by such moralists as Plato and his master Socrates. Nero soon became an adept in the practice of this vice, causing, however, little comment. It was quite in the order of everyday lapses. However, even the most broad-minded critics of the time were probably horrified by a certain act of Nero in connection with a Vestal Virgin. But, one imagines that the Emperor rather loved shocking his critics.

On the other hand, he moved good-natured amusement (mingled, perhaps, with a sigh from the more thoughtful) when he went through a form of marriage with a favourite youth. In order to emphasize the marriage, Nero commanded a very elaborate and expensive ceremony. The "bride's" dress consumed an enormous sum of money. Calling Sporus his wife, his darling wife, the Imperial *farceur* paraded the streets of Greece with the boy beside him, kissing him passionately on the way.

A humorist of the day remarked that it was a thousand pities that the father of Nero had not married a similar sort of wife!

Meantime, Agrippina was growing restless. There is little doubt that when she so materially assisted Nero to his throne she had counted upon a very large share of power. When this desire was thwarted, when she perceived that the son for whose advancement she had committed a carefully-planned crime, ignored and even flouted her, she showed what was a very natural resentment.

Gradually the breach widened between mother and son. There were constant quarrels. From time to time the woman threw out dark hints to the effect that the succession of Nero to Claudius had been an act of imposture—that Britannicus, the son of Claudius by his wife Messalina, was in reality the legitimate occupant of the throne.

The threats terrified Nero. He realized that here was a woman capable of any treachery. She might betray her son as she had murdered her husband. Moreover, Britannicus was esteemed by the people. One false step, and the son of Claudius might take his place.

Once more the highly useful Locusta was called in to proffer her professional services. She entered into the scheme with her usual enthusiasm. A subtle poison was introduced into the food of the boy.

The poison failed. Perhaps the food was not consumed by the potential victim. Nero, in a fit of rage, sent for Locusta, had her stripped naked, and brutally thrashed her with his own hands. One imagines that an episode of this kind is unique in Imperial records.



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However, he still retained sufficient faith in the ingenious poisoner to give her a second opportunity. A new poison was prepared. Before it was administered the Emperor himself saw it tested, first on a kid and afterwards on a pig. Both animals died immediately.

In order that this time there might be no breakdown in the arrangements, Nero contrived that the poison should be administered to the wretched youth whilst at supper in his own company. The thing was done. The supper-party was interrupted by a tragedy!

Nero at once assumed a look of pious horror and suggested that his half-brother had died of the falling sickness. The suggestion was accepted. Inquests, as we know them, were not frequent in those times, and certainly not upon the bodies of them that died in palaces. The proceeding might have been dangerous for the coroner who gave an honest verdict.

This crime accomplished, Nero soon afterwards turned his attention to his mother. Stung by her constant reproaches, and her jealousy of his devotion to the freedwoman Acte, who had compelled his passing fancy, he told himself that her presence was a constant danger. She, too, must go.

Picture Nero at this time. Imagine him lying awake during those feverishly hot nights in Rome or in his villa at Baiae, his lurid brain torn with anxiety, his overweening egotism all a-quiver lest he should be despoiled of his throne by some subtle trick.

He might have reasoned with Agrippina, appealed to her affection for him; he might have

done twenty things that would have in all probability smoothed matters and secured his place. But the professional murderer ever takes the line of least resistance. The easiest method of securing his end lay in the direction of murder. To murder, therefore, Nero turned his eyes.

Three times poison was tried. Each time it failed. (It is more than possible that Agrippina was on her guard, realizing with whom she had to deal.) Finding that the arts of Locusta had failed him in this instance, the Emperor became a strategist in crime.

His next contrivance was an artfully rigged roof to the chamber in which the woman slept. This roof was arranged in such manner that it should fall and smother her whilst she lay asleep. This scheme, like the first, came to naught.

It was a new experience for Nero—this experience of failure. One wonders what passed in his brain when he realized the breakdowns. Did he waver? Did he ask himself whether the thing was worth pursuing? Hardly! Persistence in villainy is the dominant characteristic of dark souls. They may waver in their kinder resolves—never in their evil enterprises. They are true to their natures in that respect, if they are true in nothing else.

Again he planned. Perhaps the waters of the sea as he sat in his villa at Baiae may have set his brain on the track of the idea. Or perhaps Anicetus, the Admiral of the Fleet at Misenum—an unscrupulous opportunist—may have suggested the scheme.

It was decided to take a certain boat in which Agrippina was to voyage and submit it to such a

process that it would break asunder when at some distance from the shore. The arrangement was carried out with great secrecy, and much ingenuity was shown in the engineering feat.

A storm arose, and during the storm the conspirators split the frail boat asunder. This all went according to plan with the exception of the *main* event. For Agrippina, a strong swimmer, contrived to reach the shore in perfect safety.

From the place where she was now lying in banishment (for she had been exiled from Rome some time before), Agrippina sent a messenger hot-foot to Nero, announcing her escape. One can imagine the sardonic smile on the woman's face as she realized how she had thwarted her son-assassin. Indeed, she may have subconsciously felt a measure of admiration for the scheme; for was it not worthy of the mother of Nero herself?

Nero fell into a paroxysm of rage when the messenger, Agerinus, announced his news. Beside the Emperor stood Seneca, his old tutor, and Burrus, præfect of the Pretorian Guards, good men both, good men humiliated by being compelled to listen to the hideous truth.

They could not help themselves, these two men. They were honest, generous, kindly; but the old Roman disdain of death was not in them and they had to truckle to the tyrant.

Perhaps, too, they realized that Agrippina might easily become a very dangerous foe to all that had stood by her son, and that their own safety demanded her removal. After some deliberation, Seneca put forward the suggestion

that the woman should be killed outright by the guards.

This suggestion was rejected, for Burrus pointed out that the men would shrink from slaying the daughter of their beloved Germanicus. It was then that Anicetus formulated a sudden scheme, which he proceeded to put into execution forthwith.

Seizing a dagger, he flung it at the feet of the messenger. A moment later the latter was under arrest on the charge of having brought that weapon to assassinate the Emperor, at the command of Agrippina.

The pretext served. All could now be done in perfect form. Soldiers were instantly summoned—the order for the killing of Agrippina was conveyed to their leader.

To the lonely house where the exiled Empress sat alone, save for one girl-slave, the men journeyed. The room was lighted by a single lamp. Presently the attendant went out. Then Agrippina said: "She, too, has left me!"

Came the tramp of feet upon the threshold. The door was brutally flung open. The soldiers clattered into the room. She realized why they had come.

And now, for the first and last time in her career, we may send one drop of admiration across the centuries and offer it to the memory of Agrippina. For she showed no fear—no anxiety. Rising calmly from her chair, she said to Anicetus: "If you have come to ask concerning my health, I am recovered; but if to do a crime, I cannot believe that my son has ordered it."

(But most surely she knew.)

Not a word was spoken by the leader. But almost instantly a soldier raised his sword and struck at her breast. Then Agrippina said quietly: "*Strike lower, for there a Nero was born!*" The soldier stabbed her, and she fell dead within a few minutes.

Terrible words, these! If the words of Christ—"It is finished!"—are perhaps the most triumphant words in history; if the words "He has no children"—of Macdull are the most despairing; then surely the words of Agrippina—"Strike lower, for there a Nero was born!"—are the most tragic that history has to record in the long pages of human anguish.

A species of remorse seized Nero after the committal of this crime of matricide. There is a difference, however, between remorse and repentance. One imagines that had Agrippina been resurrected the crime would have been repeated. The remorse of emotional people is a short-lived affair.

At this point, perhaps, we may glance for a moment at the love-passages of Nero's career. Love, in the altruistic sense, he had none to offer. It is possible that his feeling was the very poorest kind of lust mingled with a certain artistic appreciation.

His first wife, Octavia, a woman of fine character, he soon grew to dislike. Following his customary methods, he made various attempts to strangle her. Eventually she went into banishment and was divorced from her affectionate mate. Later, she was murdered by his command on the pretext that she had committed adultery. There is an almost amusing irony in the

contemplation of this man, whose morals were the morals of the farmyard, assuming this high moral tone.

For some time previous to the banishment of Octavia, Nero had had as mistress *en titre* the alluring Poppaea Sabina. Twelve days after divorcing his wife he married this woman of very remarkable beauty. The life of Acte, short, tempestuous, was ended by a kick bestowed upon her by Nero when she was about to bear him a child. She had reproached him for his late return from some buffoonery. The Emperor retaliated in characteristic fashion.

One has to record likewise the murder of Antonia, the daughter of Claudius. The crime was committed ostensibly on the plea that she had conspired against Nero. The truth was that she had refused to become his paramour.

Isolated murders were the prelude to the great orgy of killings that followed. Sudden, overwhelming passions for the shedding of blood would seize his soul. Then friends, enemies, servants, children, went down in the battue.

Meantime, the Christians hiding in their caves, preaching in their remote little churches, had been left unmolested. Until the advent of Nero, the Pagan rule was a tolerant rule. His predecessors, indeed, had taken small notice of the members of this new sect, whom they held in good-natured contempt.

But in those unoffending creatures whom none would pity—whose massacre was hardly likely to raise indignation—Nero saw his opportunity

for further bloodshed. The outbreak of the great fire formed his pretext.

The Rome of those days was a city of slums and palaces, of crooked, ill-constructed streets and houses. The masses lived in huge tenements similar in principle if not in construction to the working-class dwellings of our own time.

The fire began on July 19th, A.D. 64. For six days and nights it tore its way through the city, being checked at length by the voluntary destruction of certain buildings. It broke out afresh, and raged furiously for three more days.

Writers of fiction have made a great deal of the story that Nero sang, to his own accompaniment, the song of the downfall of Troy whilst the flames were at their height. There is no positive evidence of this exhibition of the artistic temperament, but it contains what philosophers call "potential truth"—that is to say, *if it did not really happen there is no reason why it should not have happened*. It was exactly the sort of thing that Nero would have loved to do. . . .

At a later period, he frequently said that the fire had been a very admirable happening, for it enabled him rebuild a Rome that sadly needed reconstruction.

After the quelling of the flames, Nero showed a certain public spirit. He ordered that the official buildings of the city should be thrown open to the homeless people—he even went to the length of placing the gardens of the palace at their disposal.

It is hardly conceivable that pity inspired this move. It was probably due to policy. The

cunning brain no doubt realized that the Imperial power was waning—that the people who had borne tyranny and bloodshed with surpassing patience were growing weary at last. Doubtless he saw in this move a means of gaining a new hold on their favour.

The organized persecution of the Christians—the grand climacteric of Nero's campaign of killing—began soon after the great fire. It has been suggested by some writers that Jewish influence was at work in the instigation of this horrible mass murder, but there is not a single ounce of evidence to support the suggestion. It is possible that Nero, recognizing the prejudice against those humble creatures, conceived the notion that his popularity might be sustained by a wholesale persecution. This view, combined with his passion for killing, may have urged him forward.

Whatever the cause, the horrible business began. The wretched people were hunted from their hiding-places, massacred *en bloc* or reserved for choicer and more spectacular ends.

One need not linger over the details. A hundred novelists have described those scenes wherein Christianity endured its first martyrdoms. The Christians were mangled by wild beasts, hacked by gladiators, crucified in degrading positions; done to death, too, in ways from which decency shrinks to contemplate. Probably it was Nero himself who conceived the notion of illuminating his palace gardens with living torches. Where those agonized torches flamed nineteen hundred years ago the Christian cathedral of St. Peter's stands to-day!



Nero, indeed, required some diversion to turn his thoughts from the condition of affairs. Unrest was sounding throughout portions of the Empire—in Britain there were some very serious defeats.

The persecution of the Christians, if in truth it was designed by Nero to gain the favour of the people, failed in effect. For the tide was now beginning to flow heavily against him. He was openly satirized, ridiculed. Libels in Greek and Latin were sung and recited in the theatres. That Nero had murdered his mother and connived at the murder of Claudius was openly hinted by actors, and mummers, and writers.

Nero, strangely enough, ignored these comments. Perhaps in his supreme egotism he fancied that no reproaches could touch his majesty. Or perhaps (who knows?) he was secretly amused. He certainly possessed the artistic temperament—it probably included a sense of humour of a highly mordant brand.

In A.D. 65 there happened the first really serious conspiracy against his life, planned by certain senators and knights. The most important outcome of this outbreak was that Tigellinus, his favourite minister, was enabled to strike down not only the conspirators but likewise Seneca, who was known to be tacitly hostile to the court.

The closing years of the Imperial monster's reign were spent in Greece, where he gained glory in the games, but perhaps loved still more the subtle flattery of the Greeks. Meantime, Rome was governed by two freedmen, Helius and Polyclitus. The former, knowing well the presence of growing discontent among the Western

armies, begged his master to return. After many delays, Nero went back to Rome, wearing the crown of wild olive of the Marathon games.

At length the storm broke. It is amazing that it had tarried so long. On the 19th March, A.D. 68, news was brought to the Emperor of the rebellion in the great province in Gaul.

Incepted by C. Julius Vindex, it was crushed by a loyal præfect, Verginius Rufus, who was just in time to prevent the rebels from joining forces with Galba, who was revolting in Spain. All might have been well but for the cowardice of Nero, and treachery in Rome itself.

Nero received the tidings with apparent indifference. He joked concerning the chances of losing his throne. He began to practise minstrelsy with some ardour, saying that some day he might be forced to depend upon song for a living and that a good artist found a home in any land.

Soon afterwards came the second warning. Rebellion had broken out in Germany; Galba in Spain was at the head of a mighty force. No longer did Nero show indifference. He fainted when the news arrived and did not recover for some time.

But he took no action. His character, always at the mercy of every impulse save the impulse of courage and determination, quivered and collapsed.

He temporized. He spoke of the things that he would do, but none of them materialized. He formulated crazy schemes. At one time he desired to slay every Gaul in the city. At another time his rage would turn against his own people—and he would suggest that the wild beasts of the

arena should be turned loose in the street to devour the mob. One day he was on the point of journeying to Alexandria to become a public singer.

His favourite notion, however, was rather base. He said that he would go to Gaul, to the disaffected region, and there he would play a part. He would weep and humble himself. The people would pity him, he suggested, and pitying would regain their loyalty.

In the hour of danger the brave man sees one way alone, the coward sees many ways. It was thus with Nero when the Furies were at last sounding their notes in his ears.

Rebellion is a subtly infectious thing. It swept to Rome itself, and the people openly rose against their Emperor.

There followed the final blow when news was brought him as he sat at dinner that his last army, his last general, had deserted him. Mad rage seized him. He knocked over the table, smashing everything within his reach.

Then he made ready for what might be to come. He secreted in a gold box a portion of a poison given him long since by Locusta. He realized that it might be required very soon.

For a moment, he intended going to the Forum and there making a piteous appeal to his people. But at the very gates he turned back. He feared he might be torn to pieces on the way.

Quite soon the palace was deserted. The guards went, the humblest slaves went likewise, stripping every room of its treasures. The gold box containing the poisoned dose formed part of the booty,

snatched by some jeering slave from Nero's bedchamber.

Then, half-dead with fear, stumbling like a drunken man, the Imperial criminal went out at last, intending to drown himself in the Tiber. One man, however, still stood by his master. Phaon, a freedman, took Nero to his villa, four miles outside Rome. And so, barefooted, a ragged coat flung over his tunic so that he might not be recognized, but might pass as a beggar, raging, moaning, at times calling on his gods, and at other times cursing them with the language of the slums, our Emperor crept forth to his last rendezvous.

He was spared no humiliation. Arrived at the villa he had to enter it by crawling on hands and feet through an aperture in the wall, and thus into a mean slave-chamber.

In that low-ceilinged slave-room they crowded round him, Phaon and a few slaves who still held some kind of loyalty to their tyrant. Presently there came a messenger from the Senate with a letter for Phaon. Nero snatched the message and read the words.

They had ordered his immediate execution. Moreover, he was to die in the "ancestral fashion". With strange innocence the Emperor asked what that signified. They told him that he would be stripped naked, his head placed in a fork, and his body scourged till he died.

They brought him a dagger; they placed it in his hands. He was a Roman, they told themselves; he would know what to do with that dagger. But they did not know the man.

He was afraid. He took the dagger, felt its

point, threw it down. They knelt beside him, imploring him to drive it home.

Presently Nero began to whimper faintly. Then he said softly: "What an artist dies in me!" After that, in order to gain a little delay, he gave orders concerning the preparations. He said that his grave must be dug and that fragments of marble must be brought to adorn the tomb. Wood and water must be fetched for the funeral pyre.

He raised his head and asked Sporus to chant his funeral song, saying that all should be done in order. Then his trembling lips recited epigrams and quotations from the poets. Perhaps even in that hour he hoped that history would record that he died with an epigram on his tongue.

The end could not be delayed much further. The horses' hoofs on the road announced that the soldiers were at the villa gates.

That sound woke Nero's fading heart. He took the dagger once more and held it to his throat. Even then he faltered, and it was given to the slave Epaphroditus to drive it home.

The gates were flung open. The soldiers rushed into the slave-chamber. A centurion, kneeling beside the dying Emperor, tried to stanch his wound. Nero turned upon him with a glance of contempt. "Too late!" he muttered faintly. "Is this your fidelity?" He died with those words on his lips.

So passed Nero Claudius Cæsar in the thirty-second year of his age. Into those brief years he had packed ten lifetimes of evil and horror.

The love of self inherent in the man held to

the last. A few minutes before the end he asked that his body should not be mutilated after death. This desire was respected; and a funeral of moderate splendour was accorded him. He was buried by two nurses who had loved him as a child in his beauty and who, perhaps (for who shall say what memories did not stir their hearts), loved him still!

The personal appearance of Nero was sufficiently impressive. He was of tall figure, approaching six feet. Suetonius tells us that his hair was yellow, his face fair, his eyes grey, his neck fat. He had a heavy chin, the true chin of the professional killer. His health was constant; in spite of orgies and vices he was sick only three times in fourteen years.

In an age when it is fashionable to pity and condone the most evil of mankind, one may perhaps spare a passing commiseration for this man; for of a certainty he was heavily handicapped. Heredity, early training, evil maternal influence, unlimited power, the environment of a vile and decadent civilization—all worked their way with him. The very Stoic who was his teacher was held from teaching him the best.

For Nero was not all destructive. He rebuilt Rome, and the rebuilding was a fine achievement. At one period he desired to lower taxation, and to promote free trading throughout his Empire. One imagines, too, that his more admirable traits have been left unrecorded by historians who concentrated on the lurid deeds of his disastrous reign.

One must remember, moreover, that in his contempt of human life, Nero was not alone. One of the most far-reaching changes introduced by Christianity into the theory and practice of existence is the idea that human life, as such, is sacred, an idea distinctly opposed to the actual practice of Pagans, if not entirely novel to them.

This record has dealt with the crimes of Nero, but an imagination of vast catholicity would be needed to formulate any logical or even plausible explanation of their origin and perhaps dimly-conceived purpose. To say that love of killing inspired these crimes is certainly not to explain the problem with any kind of satisfaction. The motives that inspire apparently motiveless crimes are perhaps too subtle even for the most profound psychologist.

In an idle moment one might divert oneself by speculating as to what Nero might have been had he lived in another age—our own, for instance—and had been a man of the people. Stripped of autocratic power, he might have been comparatively harmless. One fancies that he would have been too cowardly, too lethargic to contemplate a life of desperate crime. The profession of thief or cut-throat would not have appealed to him whose courage was never a conspicuous characteristic.

There is the possibility that he might have become an actor of a kind—and not the best kind. The irresponsible and sometimes lazy life would have had some attraction. He would have been too much of the trifler to gain lasting success. One can picture him drifting through mean provincial towns, making brief love to any

woman in the place. Whilst money remained, he would have been generous to his paramours, but he would certainly have sponged on them when it was spent. Later in life he might have become a *souteneur*, and thrashed the wretched girl who failed to satisfy his greed.

However, speculation, though amusing, is always futile where human character is concerned, nor need one add to the canvas whereon the picture of this Emperor is painted by imagining other colours.

“What an artist dies in me!” Nero had said. The Imperial throne needed no such artist. He had cast down all that remained of the old Rome of the Romans, and the sickly brilliance of a debased Hellenic culture shone upon the city that had risen from its ruins.





SAWNEY BEANE

1390-1435 (?)



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**A**NTHROPOLOGY perhaps contains few studies more intriguing than the study of what is called Cannibalism. That this practice, so appalling to the civilized brain, has existed from the earliest ages there is little doubt. Nor has it invariably been confined to savage races. Races owing some degree of culture have practised cannibalism, if not as a constant thing, at least as a magical or ritualistic ceremony.

In isolated places, there is evidence that the eating of human flesh still persists to some extent. In ancient Mexico, in the Greece of pre-Homeric times—in Africa, Australia, the Fiji Islands, and among the Indians of North-West America, it was practised to an inordinate degree. It is conceivable, indeed, that in those remote ages a person who refrained from the practice was regarded with feelings similar to those with which the modern beef-eater regards the pale vegetarian.

Civilized man (as the records of recent times demonstrate) becomes a cannibal when faced with elemental passions. There is no necessity to linger even for a moment on those stories of shipwreck, wherein survivors have whispered

words of sinister deeds committed on the bodies of their shipmates. Man forced down to elemental things commits elemental acts, and there is the possibility that in the early days of humanity upon earth cannibalism was as frequent as the eating of animals. It was merely a matter of convenience. If the animal was caught, the animal was devoured; if the man was trapped, then the man formed the sacrifice to the elemental appetite.

There is a form of pathological disease which, under the name of lykanthropy, is associated with a delusion that the patient is a wild-beast craving for human flesh. This species of brain-illness is, fortunately, not very frequent. Its symptoms, however, are very horrible, and the patient has to remain under constant surveillance lest the blood-lust overcome him. The legend of the werewolf probably owes part, if not the whole, of its origin to this amazing madness.

Out of the age-long record of cannibalism practised for divers reasons, there stands forth one man who for twenty-five years fed on human flesh, not because he was dimly working out some superstitious belief; not because he had fallen a victim to a form of brain-disease, but simply because he found himself in circumstances where a lazy and secure life might be enjoyed by means of robbery, murder, and cannibalism.

Sawney Beane began life normally enough as the child of a peasant father and mother in East Lothian. He was born in a village at no great distance from Edinburgh. The date of his birth is uncertain, but it is probable that the period was in the neighbourhood of 1390.

Hedging and ditching—honest peasant work—was the labour to which Sawney Beane gave a few grudging years. But the criminal tendency in his composition caused him to loathe physical exertion. He complained bitterly that a youth of his abilities should toil in the fields. Sometimes he would lie in bed all day, and drive off with curses and with blows those who tried to force him to the fields.

It is possible, however, that he might have remained throughout his life in that village of his birth, doing as little work as possible and perhaps giving his hands to sly picking and stealing, had not a certain romance intervened. He conceived a passion for a girl in the village, and wished to marry her. Certain difficulties arose, and they decided to escape from them by taking to flight. Without seeking the benefit of clergy, Sawney Beane and his companion wandered from East Lothian until they came at length to a deserted part of the country. A storm arose and drove them to take shelter in what appeared to them a mere cave on the rocky coast of Galloway. During the night, they discovered that the cave was in reality a cavern of huge length and dimensions. It extended nearly a mile under the sea.

History, unfortunately, does not tell us exactly how this youth of twenty or twenty-two first happened on robbery, murder, and the horrible sequel of cannibalism. But it is easy to reconstruct the situation to some extent.

Picture the scene for a moment! A wilderness of shore and rock with the sea lashing an iron-bound coast. A place where no man passes save a

traveller bound for the harbour, where he may embark for Ireland. A half-savage young peasant—a girl beside him for whom and for himself he must of a certainty find food and drink. In his heart and brain a rebelliousness, a lawlessness which the wild spirit of unrest in the Scotland of that period did much to breed and foster and bring to a murderous climax!

The thoughts of the man must inevitably have turned to robbery as the one means of livelihood. There was none else, unless he worked—and, as we know, he hated toil. From contemplating robbery, his thoughts must have travelled to murder as the natural sequel—the natural sequel because the robber of past centuries had no incentive to spare his victim. If a thief were captured, he was promptly tried and hanged. Nothing more could be done to a murderer. It was therefore a mere instinct of self-preservation that frequently converted a good-natured stealer of goods into a killer of men. No stronger argument against capital punishment for minor offences could possibly be put forward.

Now imagine Sawney Beane having gone out from his hiding-place one night and having robbed and killed a traveller. His first impulse would be to drag the man into the darkness of the cavern whilst he considered what he should do with the corpse.

It is a night of storm. The larder contains no food. Hunger begins to gnaw the man and his companion. Already they have made some attempt to dissect the body of their victim—in order that the dismembered parts may be thrown into the sea. They have decided that this method



SAWNEY BEANE  
And one of his victims





will doubtless prove the safest means of avoiding detection.

Their hunger intensifies. They search the dark corners of that strange home for some remnant of food. Nothing! Slowly, the madness of the hunger-pain seizes their vitals. Food! Food! They must have food. Nothing else matters. They stare at each other harshly. There is no kissing now--no twining of arms and limbs. Lust or love, or whatever drove these two to this place, is swamped in the still more fundamental passion of hunger.

Then swiftly, coming from some atavistic cavern of consciousness, travels the impulse to eat the human flesh that lies a few feet distant. The impulse at the outset is perhaps only half-formed, dimly recognized. This shall be the first and the last time. Hunger shall be satisfied for this night alone by an impromptu feast! To-morrow, the storm will pass. To-morrow he will leave his cavern and go out to seek legitimate food. To-night, the wolf eating his vitals shall have other stuff to gnaw. . . . He tells the woman what is in his mind; or perhaps a gesture, a look, a cry, reveals his purpose. She understands. She, also, compromises. To-night they will do this, but never again. They whisper, their eyes no longer glazed with exhaustion, but flaming with desire.

They rush to the corner where the severed limbs lie, covered with sacking. They heap them on the fire. The strong smell reassures them--whets their longings. Before the horrible meal is half-roasted they are squatting on their haunches, tearing, gnawing, devouring. They

laugh, they shout, as hunger finds relief; their joy is the joy of the atavistic man crunching his prey.

They sleep—sleep long and deep after their debauch. When morning comes they begin to recognize dimly that they have found a solution of their problem. No longer need they starve when travellers are scarce. One robbery, one slaughter, and the larder will be filled for days and weeks.

All this is to some extent conjecture; but it is conceivable that something of the kind must have happened. How otherwise is one to explain the problem of this Scottish peasant of normal parentage, of civilized, if rough, mode of life, passing from the satisfaction of his appetites by legitimate foods to this primeval savagery? Some emergency, stark and horrible, must have arisen, and the circumstances of place and climate would certainly suggest that the emergency was on the lines that have been dimly indicated.

In the uttermost regions of the cavern, nearly a mile from the mouth, Sawney Beane and his mate bred children. As soon as these offspring were old enough to become fathers and mothers they, too, were mated, and the intercourse began.

What an existence must have been the life of this family. Perhaps nothing in recorded history is entirely comparable. The savage in his forest lair had at least the companionship of others of his race, outside his own children. He hunted all day long, he saw the sunlight. For Beane and for his children there was the everlasting darkness of the cavern, alternating with the darkness of the rugged road and shore when they went out to

rob and kill. Eight sons and six daughters were born to this savage pair, and every one of them took part in the expeditions.

Cunning as well as force was employed. Beane invariably lay in wait for his victims in a secure ambush. On occasions, the gang would attack a company of five or six travellers, providing the latter were on foot. Horsemen were never attacked in parties that exceeded two travellers. There is the probability that these cautious tactics served to render Beane and his family immune from arrest for a space that extended over twenty-five years.

His plan was to kill. He recognized the truth of the saying that dead men can give no evidence. The victims were stabbed, their throats were cut, they were sometimes bludgeoned. They were afterwards dragged to the hiding-place, dissected. A number of victims, having been dismembered, were flung into the sea. The others formed food for Beane, his children, and his grandchildren!

It must not be imagined that the frequent disappearance of travellers aroused no suspicion nor fear. Even in those times of unrest and of savagery, people could hardly vanish whilst going to and fro on their business without causing comment of some kind.

The authorities, lethargic in the beginning, were presently stung into action. Spies were sent out to patrol the lonely places near the coast. A number of these men were murdered by Beane and his family. The others returned no wiser than when they had set out. Eventually, it became impossible to secure men for this work. They swore that witchcraft was somewhere in

the business—that men were made to disappear by devilish agencies.

A panic followed. Innocent persons were suspected. More than one harmless traveller was arrested and promptly executed. Inns where travellers had slept before their evanishment were roughly searched, and the innkeepers accused of their murder. So keen was the terror excited by these panic-measures, dictated naturally by fear and baffled efforts, that several keepers of inns actually abandoned their means of livelihood and fled from the stricken districts.

Throughout this prolonged period of mystery and of horror, the presence of the cavern was never suspected. It must be borne in mind that the section of the coast wherein it was situated was a region where people rarely penetrated, neither business nor other motive taking them to that wilderness of rock and water and sky. Even assuming, though, that the place had been more freely used by travellers, the mouth of the cavern would hardly have been detected, because at high water the sea travelled two hundred yards into a portion of the vast gap. It is possible that Beane and his companion first lighted upon this refuge by the merest accident.

One wonders what sort of life was lived by this strange set of people. That the children and grandchildren were virtually in a state of savagery one can hardly doubt. Moral instruction was not to be expected from a cannibalistic father and mother. The probability is that the entire family alternated between debauches of feeding and debauches of drinking. Drink was probably the chief objective of the many robberies

committed by Beane and his accomplices, for what other ambition could have possessed him? Life in a cavernous tunnel does not present many opportunities for the enjoyment of the commodities that money can buy. But there were many drinking-places, and it must have been an easy thing for one of the party to procure the liquor and convey it to the cavern without arousing the least suspicion. Tavern-keepers of those days were frequently in a life-long condition of partial or complete fuddlement. They had just sufficient intelligence to discern the coins placed in their hands. They did not ask questions.

Sometimes, perhaps, the debauches were enlivened with snatches of song, reminiscences of the Lothian days of Beane and his wife. The Scottish peasant, like the Welsh peasant, worshipped certain bards and sang their songs. One can imagine this anthropophagist and his woman roaring drunken melodies as they sat over the remains of their feasts on human flesh. It is conceivable, moreover, that the life was rendered bare of monotony by frequent quarrels and internecine bloodshed. It was an existence partly gnome-like. For illumination there may have been candles—sinister candles wrought from human fat. A Hogarth could scarcely have painted the picture of that existence—a Wiertz magnified a hundredfold might perhaps have attempted it, and failed.

Thus for the space of five-and-twenty years did these cannibals of the fifteenth century pursue their ends; and the killings and the orgies might have run their course for many years more

had not a certain episode intervened. That episode was the escape from their attack of one man!

It happened thus. A fair of some sort was being held in a village at no great distance from the cavern where Beane held his savage state. Soon after the falling of night, the gang went into ambush, ready to fall upon the first likely travellers that came along the road. Presently a man and his wife, riding the same horse, approached the ambush. The horse was weary—was stumbling rather than walking. The rider, however, was alert, a man of great strength, obviously on his guard against possible attacks.

This man put up a defence that was almost inconceivable. Matched against a body of men and women (for the women usually took part in the encounters), he fought with sword and pistol. Spurring his tired horse, he contrived to ride down several of his assailants. During one of these movements the woman was thrown off the animal. The instant she fell the wretched creature was pounced upon. Her throat was severed, and one of the cut-throats began to suck the streaming blood. The sight of this horror maddened the man—causing him to fight with increased vigour. Indeed, so tremendous was his battle that the assailants began to waver. Their discomfiture was heightened by the sudden arrival of a group of horsemen from the fair. Instantly they fled. The darkness aided their flight; and a dense wood, the secrets of which were well-known to them, still further served to screen their passage from the pursuers. Eventually, the pursuit was abandoned. The man told his

story, and that same night set out, in company with several others, for Glasgow, where the affair was reported to the Provost.

That official took it upon himself to inform the king. His Majesty King James the First of Scotland was essentially a democratic personage. He took enormous interest in his people. An author and poet of some distinction, he probably sought for what modern writers call "copy" among the lower sections of his subjects. He loved excitement, mystery, the colour and movement of life.

After consultation with the magistrate, the energetic monarch immediately announced his intention of assisting in the capture of the criminals. He probably criticized with a certain humorous severity the absurdly trivial attempts hitherto made to discover the authors of the outrages that had covered a long space of years. Finally, he ordered a troop of four hundred armed men to set forth on an expedition, himself taking command of the soldiery.

The expedition started three or four days after the outrage following the fair. A large number of trained bloodhounds accompanied the troop. There is perhaps no keener hound than the Scottish breed, and even to this day they hold a certain supremacy. One can only wonder why these admirable creatures were not brought into use at an earlier time during those twenty-five years of Sawney Beane's mass-murders. The explanation may in all probability lie in the fact that these hounds were not common property. They were employed principally for military purposes, and a number would be found in royal



kennels. In the gloomy period of the Scottish rebellion of the eighteenth century, the Duke of Cumberland used bloodhounds for the pursuit of fugitives and escaped prisoners. In the case of the Sawney Beane mass-murders, they would probably not have been employed but for the direct intervention of the king.

During the first part of the day the expedition met with no success. Every section of the coast and many miles inland were explored. The cavern itself was passed by the troop.

Presently, however, several of the dogs vanished, and soon afterwards their voices were heard, raised in the deep sullen tone that is characteristic of the breed. A number of men dismounted. They followed the sound and came at length to a small opening in the rock. Having entered the cavern, they were about to turn back, for it seemed to them that no living creature could possibly be hidden in that remote and black fissure.

The howling and warning notes of the hounds persisted. By this time the animals had penetrated some distance into the cavern. The scouts retired, and came back to the road for reinforcements. The king himself joined the force, and after a slow and painful progress, the cavern was penetrated to the distance of several hundred yards.

The hounds had now secured a triumphant scent. Urged forward, they burst into the innermost section of the monstrous cave and came full upon the cannibal family engaged at that very moment in one of their horrible meals.

The historian from whose record this chronicle is written does not relate whether or not Beane

and his sons and daughters put up any sort of fight. The probabilities are that they did nothing of the kind. It must be remembered that they were taken by surprise; that the winding passages of the cavern would most certainly have shut from their ears the cries of the hounds; and, moreover, that people sitting at meat and gorging themselves to the full would hardly be the persons to engage in serious and successful battle. But whether this surmise be correct or incorrect, the fact remains that the gang were overpowered very swiftly, and bound with ropes brought for the purpose.

King James certainly had his opportunity for "copy", if that was his desire. For the sight that met the eyes of royalty must have been a sight vouchsafed in most cases only to dusky sovereigns in regions remote from Scotland.

The cavern reeked with a stench so overwhelming that several of the troop fainted. Torches had been brought by the men to aid them in their difficult passage through the rock. By the light of those torches, they saw upon the walls of the cave the arms, legs, and trunks of men, women, and children. Limbs dangled also from cords in the ceiling roof. In a corner of the cave garbage was heaped, many feet high. Oozy mud and filth lay deep upon the ground. Mingled with the odour of decomposing flesh was the sickly wild-beast smell that sometimes emanates from lunatics. Strong liquor spilt during many orgies added its decaying fumes. Young children with matted hair, fierce eyes, a-crawl with insects, lay sleeping on the cold ground.

The spoils of robbery lay scattered in a

glittering heap. There were swords, pistols, jewels, gold, silver. Garments and boots of all kinds formed part of the mass. Imagine a butcher's shop, a pawnbroking store, a charnel house, a dissecting-room, a semi-drained sewer, and a rag-and-bone warehouse combined in one scene, and the cavern of this fifteenth century mass-murderer is set before the eyes in something of its horror, its gloom, its filth!

The first act of the expedition after the securing of the prisoners was the burial of the limbs and trunks of bodies. This burial was swiftly performed in the sands. The king, after having remained for some time in the cavern, returned to Edinburgh, and at a late hour of the night Sawney Beane, his children, wife, and his grandchildren, were conveyed to Edinburgh and imprisoned in the Tolbooth.

There was no question of trial. Indeed, at that period of Scottish history, these formalities were frequently overlooked. A trial, however, would have been of small advantage to Beane and his family, seeing that the evidence against them was of a nature that no amount of pleading could have weakened or removed.

A conference was held, and it was decided that a mass-execution should take place within twenty-four hours. Moreover, the execution was to be on the grand scale—a scale that should awaken a sense of justice done among the terror-stricken inhabitants. For twenty-five years Sawney Beane had robbed and murdered. Innocent men had died in his place. To hang him and his associates would be a childish and trifling thing. Something more spectacular, something that

would appeal to the demand for vengeance, was obviously required. It is only in comparatively recent years that punishment as a deterrent rather than an act of vengeance has taken possession of the minds of the guardians of the safety of Society.

The men were taken first. A preliminary of the horrible punishment can only be lightly suggested. It took the form of an excision of certain vital organs which were cast into a fire before the eyes of the agonized wretches. This initial operation having been performed with cruel slowness, their hands, arms, and legs were then sawn off with blunt saws, the executioners prolonging the process to an inordinate degree. After this, they were left to bleed to death, the curses and jeers of the mob that had come to see them die accompanying their passage from life.

Not only the women, but the young children were compelled to witness the horror. When at length the men had ceased to breathe, the females with their young in their arms were bound to iron stakes and burned at slow fires.

The chronicler, in an outburst of foolish moralizing, remarks that every one of these people died without showing a sign of repentance. In view of the fact that with the exception of Beane and his wife the culprits were on a level with savages in regard to morality and knowledge of right and wrong, the remark is as absurd as it is unjustified. It is conceivable that not one of them realized for a single moment the horror and evil of their actions. Equally might one speak of a tiger or a snake dying in a state of

unrepentance! But we must remember that the chronicler belonged to a century when people moralized on paper and immoralized in all other quarters!

No correct estimate could be formed of the number of people who became victims of Beane and his family, but our chronicler suggests that probably a thousand men and women met their deaths at the hands of this monstrous criminal. This estimate is doubtless exaggerated, but the number must have been very large when we remember that for twenty-five years the cannibalistic practices endured without any kind of break.

It is more than possible that the love of human flesh became a passion with Beane and with his female companion. In the beginning (as we have suggested), the act of cannibalism may have been a mere emergency measure, but the taste, once acquired, doubtless secured a hold on both of them. The children born into a state of cannibalism would naturally eat human remains as a matter of course.

Cave-dwelling still survives in certain parts of Scotland, notably on the coast of Argyll. Near Oban there are many caves of enormous dimensions, and at certain seasons tinkers and other nomads frequently take up their residence in caverns for periods of many weeks. The presence of slate in these caves affords a certain dryness, and after lengthy sojourns the inhabitants have emerged in perfect health. Beane and his family doubtless enjoyed the rude health of savage tribes.

This has been a sordid story, but it has perhaps

been worth the telling because one imagines that the record of Sawney Beane forms the last record of cannibalism on the grand scale in Great Britain. Isolated cases have, of course, occurred; some have been revealed, others have gone unrecorded.

It has been suggested by some that this hideous criminal and his wife were in reality semi-savage chieftains who robbed and killed after the fashion of those lawless and tempestuous times. The suggestion is absurd, although an engraving of Beane, presenting him in Scottish plaid, tartan, and sporran—with amiable features and courageous mien—might help to sustain the theory. The plain truth is that Beane was merely the mass-murderer, translated into an isolated brute.

Like the murderers of all times and of all places, whether the background be the Rome of a Nero, the Paris of a Brinvilliers, or the Sheffield of a Charles Peace, this man took the line of least resistance. He devoured his victims because, apart from any horrible enjoyment of the feast, he found that method the easiest way of securing food, and indirectly of securing drink. Let it be said without hesitation that between Sawney Beane of the fifteenth century and the last murderer hanged at Wandsworth or Pentonville for killing and dismembering his victim, there is no gap except the gap of Time and the gap of Circumstance!



**FRANCESCO CENCI**

**1549-1598**





## FRANCESCO CENCI

1549-1598

IT is perhaps to the credit of the learned compilers of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" and kindred works of reference that they adopt a spirit of almost pathetic Christian charity towards the evil-doers whose deeds it is their sad business to chronicle. Wherever and whenever there appears the tiniest loop-hole for partial or complete exoneration, these kindly recorders take such advantage of the outlet that the criminal escapes through it and emerges a comparatively decent person.

In the case of Francesco Cenci, one of the most callous, cruel, and unnatural criminals of Italian history, the gentle encyclopædist has pursued his trade of charity. He suggests, for example, that there is no definite evidence to convict Francesco of the most hideous of all immoral crimes. He hints that his severities and brutalities in connection with Beatrice Cenci were urged by a fatherly spirit of resentment against an alleged act of immorality on her part in connection with a steward of his house. There is little evidence, indeed, that Beatrice was guilty of this lapse. Assuming, however, that she had been guilty, one can hardly believe that a man

whose life was a catalogue of appalling vices would have displayed so much indignation. If, as Professor Freeman assures us, historical evidence must be judged as a whole, then all the testimony is against the father and is in favour of the daughter.

Francesco Cenci was born in Rome in 1549. His father was a priest under Pope Pius V. The elder Cenci, having amassed a huge fortune by corrupt practices, died when Francesco was in early manhood. The son, placed in possession of the estate, at once proceeded to indulge in every kind of luxurious infamy.

His passions were tremendous. His appetites seemed insatiable. Whenever he desired a woman he subdued her by force or by bribes. During his comparatively brief life of forty-nine years, he was five times arrested for crimes of an unnatural kind. On each occasion he escaped imprisonment by paying a heavy fine. The Papal revenues were in low water. The fines paid by rich sinners were invariably welcomed.

The man was not merely a sensualist. He was an athlete—a lover of exercise. He cultivated the harder side of life on occasions in order that his body might support the strain imposed by his many debauches. A furious and fearless rider, he would ride a horse till it dropped. He would buy a fresh steed from the first likely traveller whom he met upon the road. If the man refused to sell, Francesco would take the animal by force, sometimes killing the owner in the struggle. His contempt for human life was almost Satanic. It is related that he sometimes boasted he had more respect for a fly than

for a man. "A fly has wings," he would say. "A man can only walk, run, or crawl. He usually does the last!"

Cenci loved new sensations. He had a morbid appetite for novelties in crime. There was no outrage that he would fail to commit if by the doing of it he could secure some fresh emotion.

This extraordinary man found time in the midst of his more lurid diversions to marry. Indeed, he married twice. His first wife does not concern this record. She died after having borne him seven children, and his next experiment in the direction of marriage was made with Lucrezi Petroni, a young woman of ancient family, whose beauty was typical of the Italian women celebrated by Guido Reni. Of this marriage there were no children.

From the beginning her life with Francesco was a mirror of hell. He treated her with cruelty and with contempt, sometimes forcing her to meet the most vile of his mistresses. Towards his children, with the exception of Beatrice, he showed hatred. To an architect, who was building for him a chapel with a very deep vault, he remarked that he hoped the day would come when he might bury all his offspring in that place! The ingenuous historian who records this anecdote goes on to say that the architect was so horrified by the words that he would have abandoned his commission had not the fee been of a very tempting nature.

Although possessed of great wealth Francesco was miserly except where his own vices and desires were concerned. He loathed spending money on his dependents. As soon as his three

eldest sons, Giacomo, Cristoforo, and Rocco were out of their tutor's hands, he hurried off the youths to the University at Salamanca. This action was due not only to motives of economy but to a hatred which he had conceived of his offspring. At the University, Francesco kept the students on such meagre allowance that they would have starved had not their fellow-students assisted them with food, supplies, and clothing. Eventually, the sons appealed to the Pope. They begged him to force the avaricious Cenci to bestow upon each of them an income of 2,000 crowns. Francesco naturally tried to evade the Papal orders, but yielded at last with much disgust.

Two daughters now remained. The elder he treated with such brutality that she petitioned the Pope to place her in a convent or to find her a husband. The Vatican was frequently used in those times as a species of superior Matrimonial Agency—many of the noblest families seeking the Papal aid to "place" their daughters. In this case the Pope seems to have acted with great promptitude. His Holiness, having compelled Francesco to bestow a liberal dowry upon the girl, found for her a husband in a member of the ancient family of the Gubbios. This daughter now passes from our history, and there remains Beatrice.

Her portrait, painted by Guido Reni, hangs to-day in the Barberini Gallery. It shows a face of serene beauty. The hair is rich chestnut, the eyes are dark, luminous. The nose is small, the mouth childish, tremulous. It has been suggested that Guido made a rough sketch of

Beatrice as she passed to her place of execution, and that he relied upon his memory to elaborate the work. Caught up in what was perhaps a fever of enthusiasm and pity, he made a portrait that was probably more truthful than he could have achieved by prolonged sittings of the subject.

Francesco, having tasted every kind of unnatural vice, now sought for a new diversion. He saw in Beatrice a sensation which stimulated his fading desires, and the horrible infamy of the desire doubtless heightened its appeal. He abandoned the harshness which he had previously shown, and began to woo the girl as a man woos his mistress.

Picture the scene! The lonely palace—a fortress from which there was no escape—the satyr father, the cowed mother, the girl innocent of life in its baser aspects, untaught, isolated from companions. At that time she was between thirteen and fourteen years of age, but with the precocity of the Southern temperament may even then have thought about love—have dreamed of the ideal lover who would come to her in the fullness of time. But the crude working of a tragic destiny was arranging matters in different shape.

Francesco, having set his heart on this act of incest, kept Beatrice a prisoner in her room. No person except himself entered it. When he went there with food and drink for the girl, he spoke cajolingly, sweetly. He begged her to forgive his former harshness.

He paved the way for his horrible conquest by gifts, pretty sayings, flatteries. A cruder brute might have committed a swift outrage,

for the child was, of course, entirely at his mercy. But that was not the way of Francesco Cenci. His subtle perversity craved a more complete, a more voluptuous surrender. Any peasant might have effected a rough deed of the kind in a moment of beast-like passion, he argued. For himself there must be a mingling of romance—the patience of the wooing, the triumph of the conquest.

One imagines that a hideous perversity was another factor in this crime. Because the horror was the very horror that even the vilest men might have hated—because it was exactly the crime that excited the keenest loathing even in an age when immorality of the natural sort was a fashion—it made an instant and an invincible appeal to the brain of Cenci.

The thing became an obsession. Finding that he was making no headway with the girl, he began to threaten her with punishments. When these threats failed, he fell into religious hypocrisies. He told her that an act of love between father and daughter was justified by the Church—that some of the most treasured Saints had sprung from this union. It is possible that this argument impressed Beatrice, for gradually her resistance weakened, and she no longer repulsed the vile beast with the energy which she had shown in the beginning.

To debauch her heart and mind he hit upon a fantastic expedient. One night he came to her room and made her accompany him to the ballroom, where orgies were being carried out by men and women dressed in fantastic clothes. Presently naked revellers came into the room.

The incidents which followed cannot be described in a volume which does not claim to be a record of pornography.

If Francesco had imagined that these exhibitions of vice would cause Beatrice to waver, he was entirely mistaken. Horrified, amazed, probably not realizing to the full what was passing, but glimpsing instinctively a measure of the crude animalism, she begged to be taken back to her prison. When she arrived there Francesco played an ingenious part. He told her that what she had seen and had caused her so much misery was the result of the wooing of strangers by strangers. If a tie of close relationship existed between two persons, pointed out this horrible sophist, then there was no guilt—no shame.

Meantime, Lucrezia, his wife, was dimly realizing something of what was happening in the room to which she was never allowed admission. At length she boldly told him that she knew his purpose and begged him to abandon it. Cenci retorted by threatening her with the most terrible punishments if she made an effort to interfere with his purpose.

Modern readers will fail to understand the situation. They will ask how it happened that two persons could be subjected to outrages of the kind recorded without recourse to the law. In the sixteenth century, however, and in Italy, things were largely under the control of Papal authority. In the case of a personage of the rank and fortune of Francesco Cenci, practically any kind of villainy might pass unpunished except for a fine, with the exception, of course, of



crimes directed against Church or State. Private villainies were held to be of small account. That is how and why Francesco Cenci was able to pursue his course without interruption.

Pursuing his end Cenci devised all sorts of schemes to subdue his daughter. He surrounded her with the most voluptuous perfumes; brought her the most tempting and most stimulating foods; forced her to drink heady wines; and introduced aphrodisiacs into the liquors. A hideously unfair contest this: on one side a practised and subtle debauchée—on the other a girl, scarcely fourteen years old, battered by threats, cajoled by flatteries, made yielding by every device that flattered the senses. The contest could end only in one way, and the end came at length.

Beatrice surrendered; and the horrible mingling of father and daughter was consummated. If the devil in whom Francesco believed had indeed existed, how he must have laughed that night. . . .

A few weeks after this crime Francesco was summoned from Rome on certain business. Now that he had gained his way with the girl, the elderly satyr gave her a certain liberty, and she was allowed to leave the room which had seen her degradation and to join her stepmother in the latter's apartments.

Lucrezia's horror was, of course, overwhelming. One must do her the justice to assume that there was no trace of jealousy in this emotion. Indeed, she had long ceased to feel any kind of affection for the man who had caused her life to be a humiliating and brutalizing experience.

Together, stepdaughter and stepmother deliberated, and eventually they prepared a memorial to the Pope, asking for his protection. The petition, however, never reached the Papal hands. It was intercepted by one of Francesco's satellites at the Vatican, and the two wretched creatures waited in vain for the answer to their prayer.

Whilst Francesco was away from Rome, Giacomo arrived at the palace of the Cenci with his friend, the Abbé Guerra, a young man of good family, whose appearance and manner made a great impression on Beatrice. The youth fell in love with her immediately. In those times, previous to the Council of Trent, priests were permitted to marry. Guerra seemed to both stepmother and daughter the man who would change the tragic situation which had arisen with such abruptness. Once let Beatrice secure a husband, and all might still be well with her.

First of all, however, the consent of Cenci had, of course, to be secured; parental authority was no mere formula in the sixteenth century. The position of child and parent approximated closely to the position of slave and master. The decision of Francesco was naturally awaited with intense excitement.

He refused, of course. Now that he had gained mastery over Beatrice and had found a subtle joy in the possession, he was certainly not going to surrender her to priest or layman. He had a long and furious interview with Guerra. At first he protested that Beatrice was too young for marriage. Finding that the priest would

not abandon his purpose, Francesco, in order perhaps to end an interview that was boring him, behaved in characteristically brutal fashion.

"I have already given you one reason why you cannot marry Beatrice," he said. "As it has failed to convince you, let me now tell you another reason, which may cause you to withdraw from this quest. You would hardly wish to marry a girl who for many months has been my mistress."

Guerra refused to believe the words, and sought the girl. There was no attempt at deceit on her part. Ingenuously and frankly she admitted the truth of Cenci's horrible declaration, and the priest, overwhelmed, disgusted, left the palace immediately.

In the days and nights that followed Francesco forced his daughter to surrender herself to him over and over again. But a new Beatrice was now coming into being. The childish innocent was no longer destined to be the toy of the brute; already her heart and brain, maddened by the loss of Guerra, were seeking a way out.

Her stepmother, her brother Giacomo, and Guerra were summoned to her room. There they consulted as to the way in which the persecution might be ended. After exploring many methods, they found themselves powerless to adopt any one of them, for reasons of various kinds. At length, the idea of murder was slowly introduced into that strange assembly.

Who suggested it first one cannot determine. Perhaps not one of them actually spoke the word—perhaps like a miasma in the air it invaded the brains of all four of them simultaneously.

Before they separated a definite resolve to kill Francesco Cenci had been formulated.

It is an axiom among civilized people that deliberate murder is never justified, but if ever extenuating circumstances prevailed in a case of organized killing, the circumstances were found in this conspiracy. It is conceivable, of course, that Beatrice might have at last discovered another way of escape, but with the hot memory of the outrages in her brain and in the brains of her stepmother, her brother, and her lover, she probably did not pause to think out a legitimate method of evading the hideous embraces. It is probable that her father had assumed in her imagination some dominating, monstrous shape, and that the removal of him seemed to the half-maddened girl the sole solution of the problem.

Many plans for the destruction of Francesco were debated by these four stricken people. Some of the schemes were fantastic, others merely crude. Perhaps the most grotesque was the suggestion that certain bandits should be bribed to waylay and kidnap Cenci, holding him to ransom, and then dispatching him later on the pretext that the ransom had not arrived. This somewhat elaborate and clumsy scheme was actually tried, but certain bunglings took place and nothing came of it.

More direct methods were then settled. Two professional assassins were hired. The killing of objectionable persons by hired murderers was an everyday commonplace of certain periods, and in the sixteenth century the Latin countries swarmed with men ready to stab, poison, or

drown at a fixed fee. Sometimes the fee was a few coins, equal perhaps to ten shillings in our money. Francesco himself had had many dealings with these obliging practitioners, and by a freak of poetical justice the two men selected for his own taking-off had more than once served him in their professional capacity.

Now it is possible that had Francesco, on his return from his journey, ceased to tamper with his daughter, the latter might have felt some softening of the heart towards her betrayer. His absence, however, seemed to have stimulated his desires, and night after night he forced her to yield to his horrible endearments. She accepted them with a sort of dull resignation, knowing that freedom was at hand.

The removal of Francesco was fixed for the night of 9th September, 1598. At supper, the stepmother, Lucrezia, drugged his wine, and so effectually was this process carried out that the man fell asleep almost immediately and had to be carried to his room. This incident aroused no kind of suspicion in the servants, who frequently had been compelled to convey their master to bed after he had indulged in excessive wine-drinking.

Marzio and Olympio, the paid assassins, had been secreted in the palace during the evening. Soon after midnight Lucrezia went to the cupboard where the men were hidden and told them that the moment had arrived. They crept out, carrying their crude tools of destruction—a hammer and long thin nails! This method of killing was frequently adopted because it caused little bloodshed. Moreover, it was very swift and very sure.

What followed might have come straight from an Elizabethan drama. Outside the room the two women waited whilst the assassins penetrated the chamber where Cenci lay in his drugged sleep. Presently the men came out. Their faces were white—they were trembling. Then Marzio stammered that nothing had been done.

"He looked so calm, so innocent in his sleep, that we could not kill him," said the sentimental professional killer.

Perhaps superstition rather than sentiment held them back. We know that there exists this superstition concerning the destruction of sleeping men. Whatever the motive, these two Italian cut-throats were for the moment afraid.

Then Beatrice, terrified lest Francesco should wake and discover the conspiracy, said at once that if they were too cowardly to carry out the just act of killing then she herself would go into the room and do the work. This threat stiffened the resolution of the trembling wretches. Immediately they returned to the room. Then one of them drove a nail into the head and the other a nail into the throat. There was no cry, no noise. The thing was done in a space of seconds!

The body of Francesco Cenci was then hastily taken from the bed, carried to the ramparts, and flung down into a garden that was rarely entered. It was believed that when the body was found the fall would be attributed to accident.

In the beginning, this hope was justified. The body was found in the morning by a gardener. It was assumed by the authorities that Francesco,

walking in a drunken reverie during the night, had fallen from the ramparts. He was buried with the usual pomp, and the episode caused small excitement in a city where tragic things happened every day.

It was impossible, however, that the crime could remain undetected for any length of time, because so many persons had been associated with it. Sooner or later one or more of them was bound to gossip. In the event, Marzio proved that one. In a wine-driven moment he allowed some incriminating words to leave his lips. Suspicion was immediately aroused. The man was arrested and subjected to extreme torture. A feeble soul, he soon collapsed, and named the five persons who had been associated with him in the conspiracy to kill Cenci. The priest, Guerra, however, had contrived to escape from Italy, and Olympio, Marzio's fellow assassin, had himself been murdered.

Lucrezia, Giacomo, and Beatrice were immediately arrested. Bernardo, the youngest of the family—a boy of fifteen—was also arrested, the authorities assuming that as he was in the palace on the night of the crime he was probably an accomplice.

Beatrice, subjected to question by torture, showed a stoic courage and endurance. The keenest agony could not make her speak. It was only when at length Giacomo came into the torture-chamber and saw her stretched in torment, that she at last surrendered. She could not bear him to see her suffer. The subtle gaoler who contrived this meeting might have claimed kinship with Machiavelli himself.

The trial of the Cencis took place before the Pope. They were admirably defended by certain advocates, but His Holiness refused to admit the extenuating circumstances that the counsel pleaded. Parricide was so frequent at that time that he was resolved to show no mercy. Lucrezia, Giacomo, and Beatrice were condemned to death. The boy Bernardo was to be spared on account of his youth, but was to be compelled to witness the punishment of his relatives.

The sentence was carried out on September 11th, 1599. An enormous crowd came to see the beheading of the three condemned, and throughout the ghastly scene showed sympathy with the victims rather than with the law.

A few days previously, being told that she was to die, Beatrice had for a moment shown some agitation. There was no agitation when the hour itself arrived. She was the calmest of the three. Her last act was to help Lucrezia with her hair, recalling how often in happier times she had done this office. Then she smiled again, knelt, said a prayer, and placed her head upon the block. The executioners did their work with speed. Within a few minutes mother, son, and daughter had passed from a world which had given them small recompense for the hard business of living.

Looking back on this tragedy after the passage of four hundred years, what are we to make of it? Concerning Francesco Cenci himself there can, of course, be no question. The man was



a monster of grotesque shape: he chose evil and made it his god.

But what of the others—of Lucrezia, of Giacomo, of Guerra, of Beatrice? Shall we regard these ill-starred people as criminals, as base in quality if not in degree, as Cenci himself; or shall we say of them that they were martyrs who held the courage to revolt against their martyrdom?

The answer must be found in Guido Reni's picture of Beatrice Cenci. The reader of the soul in the face who looks upon that portrait will understand why three persons were prepared to risk death to avenge her injuries.

It is the face of a young saint! The devil who tried to smirch her soul only partially succeeded. He may have destroyed one flower of purity, but the red blossom of courage endured. It bloomed scarlet on the night of September, 1598. It bloomed again in its fullness one year later when she faced death with calm eyes, clasping in her hand the cross that symbolizes an agony and a triumph!

MATTHEW HOPKINS

WITCH-FINDER

Born ? Died 1647



## MATTHEW HOPKINS

WITCH-FINDER

BORN ?    DIED 1647.

IT is to the credit of England that most frequently she has been the last nation to begin a social, political, or religious persecution, and the first to end that persecution. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that the history of witchcraft contains more than one chapter that reflects shame and reproach on this country, the record, fortunately, is not so prolonged nor so black as the record of other nations.

Indeed, it may be said with confidence that until the comparatively late period of Tudor times witchcraft had been regarded in Britain merely with a certain curiosity, dread, and dislike, but without any organized hostility. The fierce enmity which at length developed was evolved in Germany. The intimate knowledge of wizards and witches, of their practices, crimes, and rites, was fostered in that romantic land and at length penetrated our less morbid-minded country.

In its original—its etymological—sense the word “witch” holds no evil significance. Derived from the Anglo-Saxon “Witan” (to know), the

word simply meant "a wise woman". But words, like men, degenerate; and in the fullness of time the word that in its inception stood for pure and good knowledge became a symbol of foul and obscene wisdom.

Let us glance backwards to those primitive times long before history traced its first syllable, when man went out to hunt and slay other men, whilst women remained in the stockade to tend the fire, to nurse their children, to cook food. Woman, in the midst of those easy duties, had a certain leisure for reflection, for gossip, for communion with the simple things of Nature. In those quiet hours she gathered and sorted her herbs; she learned many woodland secrets; she became at length the woman of knowledge.

The knowledge which is power gave women in the early ages of mankind a priestly rank. But with the passage of the centuries man, ever jealous of power and wisdom, wrenched woman from her well-deserved place. Deprived of the exercise of legitimate knowledge, woman turned her powers towards baser wisdom. The truths of Nature were debased into low magic, and slowly but with complete assurance the practice of witchcraft in its evil sense was evolved.

Thus did it happen that woman, formerly the priestess of the group or clan, was torn from her place. Political influences in later ages, combined with the power of the legitimate priesthood, broke down the fortress of the primitive wise woman.

The process was, of course, a very gradual one. The dividing line between the pure wisdom of the primitive woman and the practice of what



MATTHEW HOPKINS  
Questioning an alleged witch



is called witchcraft would perhaps be impossible to indicate. Evolution worked its way—and what was in the beginning doubtless a mere piece of sudden and irresponsible trickery formed the nucleus of the great wave of base magic that swept the Western world for many centuries.

The origin of many witch-superstitions is, of course, much older than the Middle Ages. It is probable that some of them date back to savage times. For instance, the chimney legend may have derived its inception from the fact that primitive dwellings were mound-shaped. Moreover, we must remember that there is frequently a taboo in connection with doors.

The association of witches with broomsticks is another survival of the early days of life. The broom was invariably associated with what are called "fertility" rites. Again, the metamorphosis of witches into cats, mice, toads, and other creatures, was a superstition doubtless evolved from some early animal cult.

Witchcraft had, of course, always flourished in England to some extent, but no official notice was taken of the cult until the year 1541, when an Act of Parliament was passed that constituted the practice of magic a felony. It was not, however, until the accession to the throne of England of James the First that the entire population became infected with terror of the witch. The infection grew steadily. Long before the middle of the seventeenth century a massive literature had sprung up around the question. Theologians, doctors, lawyers, poets, playwrights—all contributed their more or less fantastic notions to the general pool of theory.



The Church, as might have been expected, was not slow to get to work. Very soon it inaugurated a harsh and persistent persecution; but in fairness to a body which has always been mercilessly criticized by lay historians, let us point out that it was not merely a fear of dwindling power that urged the Church's cruelty. Honestly it took the view that superstition of so gross a nature tampered with the spiritual part of religion. And religion, it must be borne in mind, constituted through many centuries the sole important part of human existence. Nothing else mattered to any appreciable extent.

The Church founded its persecution on the rock of the Mosaic command to be found in the Book of Exodus: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live". One imagines, however, that the true purpose of this mandate was sacerdotal rather than moral. The Law Giver perceived plainly that the power of the official priesthood would very soon be weakened, if not utterly destroyed, were these unlicensed practitioners to be suffered to bring about the miracles which the genuine ministers of God could not achieve. But the words served their purpose, and thousands of lives were sacrificed to their innocent or wilful misinterpretation.

The chief feature of witch-practices was a form of devil-worship. In every district groups called "covens" were established. These groups were in the habit of meeting in remote places on Friday nights. The number of persons was invariably 13: a number chosen probably because of its sinister association. The leader of the

"coven", disguised with horns, mask, and cloven-hoof, officiated in the guise of the devil himself.

It is not for us to hazard a dogmatic theory as to how far or how genuinely the people who took part in these strange rites believed in themselves and in their practices. It is possible that the majority were self-deluded. Many, no doubt, were hysterical, weak-minded, or neurotic. Others, again, may have been mere impostors, hoping to gain a hold over simple-minded villagers by their supposed acquaintance with the Evil One. But whatever the motive, whatever the belief, there is no doubt that the "coven", or group of devil-worshippers, became a recognized institution, and spread throughout the villages of every country in Europe.

It is more than conceivable that many of the witches and wizards who practised their craft may have employed some form of anæsthesia on their dupes. Hypnotic suggestion may also have been used in some cases. The anæsthesia was derived perhaps from certain plants, such as poppy, mandragora, belladonna, or nightshade. It is an ironic reflection on the savage stupidity of former times that these useful herbs were used for purposes of deceit, but never for the beneficent purposes of surgery or the relief of pain!

The most tragic and horrible fact, however, in connection with the history of witchcraft is that a very large number of persons who suffered torment and death had no association whatever with the "covens" or, indeed, with any form of alleged magic. In too many cases the victims were simple-minded old women

who, in virtue of their knowledge of herbs and simples, had contrived to effect more or less remarkable cures. It is possible that the professional healers may have resented these successes, and taken an easy method of ridding themselves of their rivals by denouncing the unfortunate women as dealers in base magic. There is not the slightest doubt that in the later stages of the persecution in this country and in Scotland, hundreds of innocent women were hanged or burned. Their love of secrecy—perhaps, also, a certain air of mystery connected with the dispensing of their medicines—may have helped to bring about their convictions.

The consistent persecution of wizards and witches was encouraged by that rather foolish king, James the First. James, who prided himself on his gifts as a writer, produced a precious volume on Demonology. His vanity was flattered when one ancient woman, who posed as an authority on the subject, told him that he was the greatest enemy the devil had ever possessed. This flattery, however, did not save the poor creature from the flames.

It will be evident from the facts thus recorded that the hour was ripe for the coming of a man who perceived in the widespread hatred of witchcraft an opportunity for enrichment and the gaining of power. That man arose in the person of Matthew Hopkins.

The date of the birth of Hopkins is unknown. Only three years of his life belong to history—the preceding years were obscure, unimportant. It is fairly clear, however, that he was born in

the early part of the seventeenth century. The village of Wenham, in Suffolk, must receive the discredit of his birth.

The son of an obscure parson, Matthew began life as a lawyer at Ipswich. Later, he went to Manningtree, in Essex; and it was during his sojourn in that place that he conceived the notion which afterwards became a pride and an obsession.

It happened that in the March of 1644 some witches assembled in his district and held a Sabbath, during the progress of which they were said to have offered sacrifices to the devil. Matthew alleged that he was attacked by imps in his garden. It is more than probable that the "imps" were mere schoolboys, who had conceived a dislike of the harsh-faced attorney. However, whether Matthew believed or disbelieved his own tale is immaterial. The fact remains that the alleged attack served as a pretext for the beginning of his campaign.

There came to him the idea of inaugurating in his own person the profession of witch-finder. Having endowed himself with the somewhat pretentious name of "Discoverer of Witches", he abandoned his attorney's stool and went forth to perform more exciting work.

Hopkins was systematic. His legal training may have aided him to form methodical habits. Having instituted a sort of ledger wherein he preserved a record of his witch-finding transactions, he bought a horse and mapped out a tour of the eastern counties.

He travelled in some style. He had an assistant, John Stern, a scoundrel as evil as himself,

a fellow ready to go anywhere and swear anything if the price were sufficiently tempting. A woman-searcher formed one of the entourage. This personage was a very necessary official, for the searching process that involved the stripping naked of the alleged witch in order to search for devil-marks could, of course, be performed only by a woman. Modesty was a virtue claimed by Hopkins, who professed that he desired all things done in order and in decency.

His "fees" were also modest. Perhaps he imagined that his early tenure of office was not sufficiently strong to permit of expensive payments. His crafty cautious soul doubtless urged him to slow-going methods. The charge was twenty shillings for each person convicted on his evidence. If the accused were acquitted, then the witch-finder received no fee whatsoever. From our knowledge of Hopkins, however, we may presume that he took care that this did not happen too often.

This cold-blooded trafficker in flesh claimed with great solemnity and dignity that he had invented certain infallible tests for the discovery of witches. A survey of the tests, however, does not suggest that they call for any marked congratulation. To our modern eyes, at any rate, they appear grotesque, inept, childish.

For instance, there was the "Pricking" experiment. The wretched woman was partially stripped of her clothes and a long pin was thrust into various parts of her body. If the alleged witch showed no signs of pain, this fact was immediately proclaimed a certain sign of guilt.

It is recorded that in many cases the women

bore the test without any outward display of suffering; but this fact may perhaps be explained by a very simple piece of trickery. The pin was frequently blunt—and the stabbing process was a mere pretence. Not only did this process serve its purpose in regard to the supposed anæsthesia, but the entire absence on the flesh of any mark was, of course, hailed as positive proof that the devil was protecting from harm his cherished representatives.

Another absurd test was the "Weeping" experiment. It was held that an authentic witch was utterly incapable of shedding tears. After a solemn exhortation the accused was formally called upon to weep. Nor would mere sobs satisfy Hopkins and his entourage. Genuine salt tears had to fall—otherwise the unfortunate woman had failed to satisfy the test. The failure to perform to order a feat which the most accomplished actress might find difficult was held to prove that the woman was under the control of a fiend who robbed her of the power of tears.

One imagines, however, that the most ridiculous and shameful of all the experiments of Matthew Hopkins was the "Water" test. The alleged witch was flung into pond or river, the right foot bound to the right hand, and vice versa. If she sank and drowned, then she was piously and wholly exonerated. If, on the other hand, by some fluke the poor wretch floated, she was immediately taken from the water and hanged or burned to death within a few days! The process, of course, was a mere variation of the colloquial saying: "Heads I win—tails you lose". The alleged witch always lost!

Hopkins, moreover, claimed the credit of inventing the "Searching for Marks" test. The woman, having been stripped naked, was subjected to a long and rigid search in order to discover insignia of the devil. The most notable of such insignia was a third teat! This, of course, was very rarely discovered, but frequently a mere mole was dignified with the name. The mark once found was immediately pricked. If no blood issued from the contact of pin and flesh, the woman was adjudged guilty. Here again we may imagine that in too many cases the pin was blunt, or the pricking process was a mere farce, the skin not being penetrated.

A favourite test of Hopkins, which he conducted with huge pride and boasting, was concerned with insects. The supposed witch was bound hand-and-foot on a stool, or chained to the wall. Hopkins would then remain in the cell and watch for the approach of fly, bee, wasp, or other insect. If he or his assistant caught the intruder, all was well; for the mere fact that it allowed itself to be caught proved it was mortal and harmless. On the other hand, if the insect escaped, it was held to be an imp or devil in a state of metamorphosis.

At first glimpse it may seem an amazing thing that the Assize judges and other people did not perceive the grotesque absurdity of these and other so-called tests, or the obvious fact that Hopkins was able to twist almost any manifestation into a proof of guilt. It must be remembered, however, that at this time a fashion in persecution had undoubtedly been inaugurated. So widespread was the fear and horror

of witchcraft that the popular voice was only too ready to condemn witch or wizard. The test itself was quite a secondary matter. Indeed, there were some sophists of the day who pointed out that even if a number of innocent women were burned as witches, it was better that such burnings should take place than that one guilty woman should escape. Of course, the point of view was an entire reversal of the modern standpoint of justice.

It frequently happened, too, that some old crone, half-witted, scarcely knowing what she said, would falter a blundering confession. One old creature, denounced by Hopkins, after being subjected to his precious "insect" experiment, openly admitted that four flies who had flown into her cell were familiar imps. She went further, and named the visitors, calling one of them "Pye-wackett" and another "Grizzel Greediguts". The witch-finder at once suggested that the confession was genuine. "How else," he asked naively, "could she have hit upon these names, which no human brain could possibly have conceived?" As a matter of fact, of course, they are names which might very easily have occurred to the simplest rustic imagination.

Sometimes accused persons were constrained to confess by the force of physical exhaustion. Thus, the victim would be marched along a stony road under a noonday sun for many miles, with bare feet and bound hands. A clergyman, John Lowes, minister of a Suffolk parish, broke down under this ordeal. He cried for water, promising to confess after he had drunk. He then admitted that he had had communion with



certain fiends. Hopkins hastened to bring about the unhappy man's prosecution, and he was hanged within a week. Before his death, he entirely withdrew his confession, saying that nothing but pain and exhaustion would have forced it from his tongue.

It would be wearisome to attempt to catalogue in detail the victims of the witch-finder. He appears to have revelled in his work. There is little doubt that he cherished the fees earned by his labours, but it is probable that his sordid soul loved far more the power, the prestige, his title of "Discoverer of Witches", and the agonies of the wretches who fell into his hands.

That Hopkins loved cruelty can hardly be doubted. There are few phenomena more subtle than the gradual development of the love of suffering. For years a man may travel his peaceful way, finding distraction in normal pleasures. There comes the moment when by accident, or in the pursuit of what he holds his duty, he inflicts physical pain on man, woman, child, or animal. Suddenly he finds himself in possession of a new and undreamed source of joy. From that time onward, unless some stronger instinct of mercy prevail, he will lose no chance of satisfying the lust that is in him. It is possible that when Hopkins began his career of witch-finding he was actuated merely by vanity and greed of money. The sensual joy of inflicting pain came later, and proved, perhaps, the strongest influence of all.

He seems to have taken little rest. Week after week he pursued his task, nor was the remotest village left unvisited. In the year

1646, we find him in the county town of Huntingdon. The population was necessarily very small, but it was large enough, notwithstanding, to yield him a number of prizes.

One woman in that place was convicted on the evidence of her own child, aged seven! Hopkins, who invariably put what legal persons call "leading questions", suggested to the little one that she had seen her mother riding on a bedrail. The child, frightened, overcome, admitted that this had happened. On that frail piece of "evidence" the woman was consigned to the fire!

In the little town of Bury St. Edmunds, Hopkins actually secured in the course of a single day no less than eighteen convictions. A day's work at Ipswich brought a similar harvest. It is said that in the three years of his journeyings, two hundred people—alleged witches and wizards—were executed by his instrumentality. It is probable, however, that the total was far in excess of this number.

Occasionally there were incidents which one would perhaps call humorous, were they not associated with so tragic a theme. For instance, at Worcester, a certain woman, who under torture had admitted dealings with the Evil One, was called upon to describe his personal appearance.

The scene was intriguing! One can imagine the judges, the court officials, and, above all, Hopkins himself, straining their ears to hear an authentic description of the fiend by one of his chosen protégées. The occasion was exceptional, because although accused persons sometimes

described the appearance of such underlings as imps or sprites, the personal appearance of the Satanic Majesty himself had received scanty portraiture.

The woman began her story. Midway, however, she broke down, confessed that the general details had escaped her memory, but that "I did find him (the Evil One) of much the same habit and feature as Mr. Hopkins!"

One can easily picture the humorous journals of to-day making a considerable amount of "copy" out of this episode, but it is more than probable that it raised little mirth in the year 1646.

Some form of trial appears to have been granted persons accused of the practice of witchcraft. It was, however, a perfunctory business. In most cases the prisoners were pre-judged from the beginning.

The trials were conducted in the ordinary Assize Courts. Occasionally an accused person escaped by some fortunate accident, but the convictions outweighed the acquittals very largely.

Everybody swore more or less falsely. Sometimes the falsehoods were intentional. Sometimes (and for the credit of our good English peasantry we must hope that the instances were not too rare) the false evidence was due to delusion or to fear.

Persons accustomed to our modern courts, with their comparatively perfect administration of justice, with their complete impartiality and aloofness from prejudice, can have small conception of what happened in less fortunate

times. Not only were the juries often chosen with a view to their bias, but the judges themselves were as biased as the prosecution. When these facts are weighed and it is remembered, moreover, that the entire population was terrified and obsessed with the belief in witchcraft, the wonder is not so much that hundreds of alleged offenders were convicted as that any of them escaped.

It must not be imagined, however, that Hopkins went his way without any species of opposition. From time to time feeble protests against his methods and his cruelties were uttered, but nothing of genuine importance happened until early in the year 1646. The Reverend John Gaule, Vicar of a Huntingdonshire parish, wrote and published a pamphlet wherein he denounced Hopkins not only as an impostor but as an unutterable rogue. Gaule believed in the presence and the power of witchcraft, as other men of his time believed; but he held the view, as was doubtless quite natural, that the Church and not a secular office should deal with such offenders.

Gaule was an honest man—honest, that is, according to the limits of his knowledge and intellect. In the pamphlet to which reference has been made he hinted broadly that many women styled witches were in reality merely half-witted, ill-favoured creatures. "Every old woman," wrote Gaule, "possessed of a gnarled face, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a skull-cap on her head and a cat at her feet is in these times not only suspected but denounced as a messenger of the devil. . . ."

Instantly the vanity of Hopkins was assailed. Overcome by that everlasting weakness of the criminal temperament, he fell into a violent rage. The Church, as represented by Gaule, was, however, too powerful for a frontal attack. He could do nothing whereby he might injure his attacker. Hopkins endeavoured to maintain his position by writing an offensive letter to the authorities of the parish from which the attack had issued. He refused to visit in his witch-finding capacity the offending district unless he were officially promised respect and obedience. He added an insolent remark to the effect that he trusted the authorities did not resemble their pastor in being an "upholder of witches". However, the local powers did not appear overcome by his threat. They ignored his letter; and the aged women of *that* parish at least were safe from the attentions of the smarting Hopkins.

The attack so admirably made by the Rev. John Gaule was followed by onslaughts from other ministers and citizens. Gradually it was whispered throughout the eastern counties that Matthew himself was a dealer in magic, in spells, in all manner of unholiness. For the question was naïvely asked: How could this man have secured so much esoteric knowledge of evil were it not that he himself had had dealings with the very powers which he denounced?

At this stage Hopkins seems to have displayed a certain amount of courage. In place of yielding to the pressure of attack and receding into private life, where he might have found consolation by cheating his clients, the man put

up a very ingenious defence. The defence took the form of a pamphlet of some length. Choked with tedious details concerning the shapes and habits of demoniacal visitors, it presented, nevertheless, an excellent piece of sophistry.

Here are several queries put forward by the Assize judges, together with the replies of Hopkins:

QUERY. That he must needs be the greatest witch and sorcerer himself, else how could he do it?

ANSWER. If Satan's kingdom be divided against itself, how shall it stand?

QUERY. If he (Hopkins) never travelled far but yet met the devil and robbed him of his books, then his help must be from the devil himself?

ANSWER. If he had, indeed, done this, then surely he had been too clever for the devil, and that was his greatest commendation and no blame whatsoever.

QUERY. From whence, then, proceedeth this skill in witchcraft? From learning or from skill?

ANSWER. From neither, but from experience, the wisest way of judging and the safest.

The remainder of the answers given by the witch-finder presents a mingling of hypocrisy, cunning, and plausibility. The man quotes Scripture with the gushing glibness of a Chad-band, ready to bend Divine sayings to his twisted uses. A sensitive person, after reading this document, experiences a sense of nausea almost physical in its strength.

The stand made by Hopkins—his defiance, his pamphlet—availed him little. Already the first grain of suspicion had been sown—none

realized better than himself how soon the harvest might follow.

Very soon the isolated attacks concentrated. Hopkins was denounced as a wizard and an impostor by people of all classes and varying shades of religious opinion. It is probable that there was some reaction against the man's persistent cruelty, but the larger part of the hatred was undoubtedly inspired by the belief that he was himself the very thing which for three years of bloodshed he had so fiercely persecuted.

There came at length the day when it was highly dangerous for the witch-finder to show his face in any public building or in the streets and roads. For a time he contrived to hide himself. Eventually he was discovered, wrenched from his concealment, denounced as sorcerer, wizard, a very comrade of the devil himself.

With an irony which they probably did not for a moment suspect, his captors insisted on submitting him to his own beloved test—the test of the water. Amid jeers and curses, Hopkins was seized, bound in the approved fashion of his own devising, and then flung into the river.

Let us try and reconstruct the scene. Gathered at the water's edge there must have been certain persons whose homes had been stripped of some loved one by the agency of this man. Sons whose mothers had been condemned for healing sick villagers—husbands whose wives had been torn from their kisses to endure torment in flames—brothers whose sisters had been sacrificed to the devilry of the hypocrite who professed to fight the devil. For among those women denounced as witches were many who were

quite young; the theory that all of them were aged creatures is a fallacy.

They must have laughed merrily, these sons and husbands and brothers. It was an age when forgiveness of injuries was not fashionable, when the eye-for-eye system of settling human accounts was cherished as deeply as in Mosaic times.

Picture it all! The struggling wretch in the water; the crowds on the bank; the tumultuous laughter; the screaming jeers; the curses, oaths, jests (some of them obscene), and all the other emotions crystallized into one hard mass of concentrated hate. And perhaps at the rear of the crowd one good Conservative witch-hater who with pathetic faith still believed in Hopkins, and who would have struck a blow for him but for fear of the consequences.

The body floated. It must always remain a mystery, this floating phenomenon. How came it that men and women bound hand-and-foot contrived to maintain this position? The question arises, however, as to whether they *did* maintain it for more than a few seconds. Is it not probable that the persecutors, anxious to bring about a conviction, held a momentary floating to be proof of guilt and retrieved the wretched victim before actual sinking could take place?

Whatever the explanation, Hopkins was speedily given a savour of his own medicine. He was dragged from the water by a dozen eager hands, and from that point the record goes on with abrupt emphasis to describe his hanging. Whether he was given the privilege of a trial the historian does not trouble himself to tell us. But we may



assume that such a trial would not have made the smallest difference to the last issue.

In the parish register of the village of Mistley, near Manningtree, there is written the record of the death of Hopkins. No reference whatever is made to the manner of his end. The entry simply states his parentage, and the date of his death, August 12th, 1647.

After his passage from a world that had no longer a use for him, Hopkins found an apologist. His former assistant, John Stern, anxious perhaps to vindicate an official position that he hoped to occupy, published a naïve and interesting document which he called "The Discovery and Confirmation of Witches". In this pamphlet he is eloquent on the subject of his master's virtues. Indeed, he describes Hopkins as a model of excellence and holiness! One imagines that the witch-finder could hardly have found a more suitable and sympathetic biographer.

A perusal of sundry memoranda written by Hopkins in the course of his journeyings reveals a man with a very keen love of detail. When he visited a Witches' Sabbath he invariably noted the tiniest phenomenon. On one occasion he catalogues certain demons who appeared at such a Sabbath. The record runs thus:—

"Hole" (demon) who came like a white kitten.

"Jarmar" (demon) who came like a fat spaniel without legs. She (the witch) sayeth that she keepeth the demon fat with blood from her body.

"Vinegar Toe" (demon) came like a greyhound, but headed like an ox. Afterwards changed into the shape of a child without a head.

"Sacke and Sugar" (demons) like unto black rabbits.

And so on through a long and wearisome list.

In a final survey let us, if possible, endeavour to see what manner of man was this Hopkins. The mere catalogue of his crimes is futile enough, although the record must stand in its crude horror if the attempt to realize the fellow is made.

One forms the conception that Matthew Hopkins began his profession of witch-finding merely as an easy and interesting means of making money. It is probable that he was weary of his dull office work. Possibly, clients were scarce. Always an opportunist, always ready to make a profitable bargain, he must have perceived the oncoming storm of witch-persecution. Could he not turn this manifestation to good account?

The first specious pretext—the story that he has been attacked in his own garden—serves his purpose. Having convicted a number of women and secured his fees, he proceeds to invest himself with the grandiloquent title of Witch-Discoverer. In that instant of entitlement, the money interest takes a secondary place. Vanity now dominates greed. He is the one man in England who holds the proud title—he must live up to its duties.

Then follows the drive of the most delirious of all human emotions—the sudden sense of power. To the man who had paced out dull years in his attorney's office, with none to bully or command save clerk and pupil, this sensation must have been glad and intoxicating.

He meets friends, acquaintances, former

clients. They laugh, slap him on the back; they praise his skill, his zeal, his success. Wherever he travels he hears his name spoken with admiration, mingled with wholesome terror.

Gradually he becomes obsessed with his office. He who in the beginning had perhaps regarded the alleged practitioners of black magic with indifference or contempt, now finds himself a fiery believer—compelling himself, indeed, to believe so that he may have the greater spur towards detection and punishment.

The revelling in the cruelty of his profession—the drawing out of the torments so that he may enjoy the exhibition of suffering—comes at a later stage. The exercise of power by all men except those of altruistic hearts is nearly always accompanied by a more or less swift descent into the foulness of sensual cruelties. It was thus with Hopkins in his hour of domination.

However, if monsters of this breed do naught else, they serve at least one useful end. For they set up images of horror from which future generations must necessarily revolt. Had the records of history held merely mild offenders, one may hazard the theory that crime, violence, and persecution would be held in less disgust. These mighty villains are the advertisers of evil; they blazon it on the hoardings of Time for all to read.

Although the persecutions of witch and wizard in Britain were appalling, they shrink to insignificance compared with the horrors in Central and Southern Europe. One may assert with some confidence that in Germany alone the number

of victims was in the proportion of five to one in Britain. Moreover, the tortures used in that country were on a scale never achieved in our own land. It would seem that in the matter of persecution, as in other directions, our people must ever preserve a certain temperateness. We simply cannot go the "whole hog" in the manner of other nations. . . .

After the death of Hopkins, the organized witch-hunting continued until late Puritan times. Later it began to lose persistency and organization, and became gradually a mere isolated episode. But as recently as the last decade of the nineteenth century a woman was condemned, and suffered as a witch, in Southern Ireland!

The personal appearance of Hopkins, if we may rely upon a rough drawing of the period, was not attractive.

He is portrayed in the act of interrogating two aged women. We see a short, foolish-looking person, with bulging eyes, loose lips, feeble chin. The mouth is curved by a sensuous leer. The ears protrude, the forehead is low, simian. One gets the impression of stupidity impregnated with cunning.

Finally, it would be an instructive if not an amusing experience to reconstruct the feelings of this man Hopkins as death closed in upon him, when at length he saw his power and his trickeries dwindling to a tree and a rope. In that sharp moment of reality did he ask himself if he had been a fool for his pains? Did his brain travel back to the office, the stool, the parchment,

to the place where obscurity and safety might have carried him through the easy years to death in a warm bed? Or was he who had looked upon so many agonized passages with hard eyes too much overcome with fright to form coherent imaginings?

Of one thing, however, we may be certain. If the devil whose actions had caused the witchfinder so much concern had, indeed, existed, the Satanic Majesty must have rubbed its hands in tender anticipation of a choice guest on the day when Matthew Hopkins left the visible world!

**LA MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS**  
**1630-1676**



## LA MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS

1630 -1676

**P**OISON, that instrument of silence and precision, has in all ages been cherished by men and women who have sought to destroy. Its use is universal and immemorial. No matter how far back into history we may travel we find poison manifesting itself in simple or fantastic guise. At certain periods, poisoners have been esteemed and patronized; have been the favourites of kings, princes, prelates, statesmen. Rome under the Cæsars was a meeting-place for professional poisoners from all parts of the world. It is said that the grateful Nero bestowed a pension upon Locusta, the court poisoner. Through the long night of what are called the Middle Ages, poisoners haunted every court in Europe. Men and women boasted of their powers of dealing out death.

On July 22nd, 1630, there was born in Paris a child who in the fullness of time developed into the most notorious woman-poisoner of an epoch. And, indeed, it was an epoch of poisoning. The infection caught from Italy rapidly ran through Europe with the swiftness of an epidemic.

Marie Madeline Marguerite d'Aubray began life with all things in her favour. One imagines that



her career must be a very sad blow to those sociologists who are never weary of claiming that environment and education form the principal, if not the exclusive, elements of the formation of character. The home life and training of this child, who in later years became a symbol of evil, were wholly admirable.

The life of Marie seems to have been uneventful enough until her marriage, at the age of twenty-one, with Antoine Gobelin, Marquis de Brinvilliers. After a year or so of domestic existence, the Marquis, probably wearying of a wife whom he had married with a view to her extensive dowry, began to pay attentions to other women. With a cynicism characteristic of the time he hinted to his wife that she was at liberty to take a lover if she chose.

The Marquise hastened to take the hint with a readiness which certainly argued more than mere wifely obedience. Some months previously there had come to live at the house of the Brinvilliers a certain Gaudin de Sainte Croix. This youth had been a fellow officer of the Marquis, who had conceived a liking for the good-looking young soldier. Marie, who had for some time been flirting outrageously with a former tutor called Briancourt, now turned her ephemeral fancy towards Sainte Croix. They were soon on terms of intimacy. So complaisant was the Marquis, or perhaps so indifferent, that neither of the lovers made the least attempt to conceal their intrigue.

Indeed, the Marquis de Brinvilliers, pursuing his Cyprians, presently left his wife to follow her caprices exactly as she chose. Thus, all might

have gone pleasantly enough (except from the point of view of the moralist) but for the well-meaning action of the senior d'Aubray. It may be said unhesitatingly that his rash and harsh intervention in the cause of morality aided at a later stage in bringing about the crimes which blackened the career of his favourite daughter.

It happened thus. Monsieur d'Aubray, having pleaded for some time with the Marquise to abandon her lover, eventually took an entirely unjustifiable course. He contrived to secure a *lettre de cachet*, and by means of this document the young officer was sent to the prison of the Bastille. In the seventeenth century, steel and poison were not the sole methods of ridding oneself of an inconvenient person. Given a certain influence at Court, and one could obtain a *lettre de cachet* with hardly more difficulty than to-day one purchases a stamp at a post office.

Sainte Croix was arrested whilst driving through the city and unceremoniously hurried off to the prison. He had guessed immediately who had ordered his capture, and the guess was soon confirmed by his captors.

He was placed in a dark damp cell, and he lay there for some time, mouthing prayers for revenge. Suddenly, out of the darkness, there came to him a man who offered consolation, telling Sainte Croix that he would help him to gain the vengeance for which he had prayed.

This man, his fellow prisoner in the Bastille, was Exili, the notorious Italian poisoner. Exili was an artist in toxicology—an artist obsessed by his art. Perhaps no painter loved his palette, no writer his pen, more deeply than Exili cherished

his sinister profession. To cancel in some way the monotony of life in prison, Exili taught Sainte Croix many of his secrets. Not only did he reveal the composition of subtle drugs, but he explained how they might be administered, and how their presence might be hidden.

There is no doubt that young Sainte Croix proved a very admirable pupil. Having learned his lesson, and gained his freedom by some freak of an official who was perhaps more conscientious than the other Bastille autocrats, Sainte Croix resolved to take immediate vengeance on the father of his mistress.

He had a motive apart from any desire for vengeance. Monsieur d'Aubray possessed a very considerable estate—a portion of which would pass upon his death to his daughter Marie de Brinvilliers. Sainte Croix realized that his influence over the Marquise was such that she would share with him her fortune.

Monsieur d'Aubray was a man of middle age. He might live for years. At their first meeting after his release from prison Sainte Croix, with hideous cynicism, pointed out this fact to the woman.

"If we destroy your father," he is reported to have said, "then everything will be easy. Not only shall we escape his everlasting tirades against our liaison, but we shall secure a large sum of money on which we can live in comfort. I will be loyal to you all my life if you help me to kill this man who has caused me more anguish than all the world."

Marie de Brinvilliers entered into this terrible compact without hesitation. The psychologists



LA MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS  
In the act of poisoning her father



find here a problem. How did it happen that this young woman who throughout girlhood and the later years had shown no sign of evil, whose disposition was apparently gentle, clinging, kindly, was nevertheless ready at the first sound of temptation to commit the most appalling of crimes?

One can hardly explain the problem by suggesting that she was passionately in love with Sainte Croix, and therefore under his influence. It is doubtful whether the Marquise was sufficiently self-forgotten to cling to any man with absolute devotion. It is far more probable that she was led to consent to the crime in order that she might be rid of her father's constant reproaches—his irritating remonstrances. The prospect of the considerable sum which she would inherit may also have weighed with her to some extent.

Sainte Croix pointed out to his accomplice that whilst he would supply the necessary drugs to destroy Monsieur d'Aubray, the actual administering of the poison must be undertaken by herself. He emphasized the fact that he had no access to the proposed victim, whereas she was his favourite child and was the last person on earth whom he would suspect of an attempt on his life. Marie waited patiently. Presently her opportunity arrived. For it happened that Monsieur d'Aubray, feeling unwell, decided to leave Paris for his country house at Compiègne. The Marquise insisted on accompanying her father, saying that she alone was capable of giving him the care he required.

Monsieur d'Aubray was delighted, for he saw in this action the suggestion that Marie was now

ready to abandon her lover. He kissed her affectionately when the scheming woman made her protestations, and said that he was certain he would find ease and peace in her society.

"You can cure all ills, my cherished darling," said d'Aubray, little dreaming of the irony that lay in his words.

The house at Compiègne was an ideal place for the consummation of a crime. It was isolated; few visitors came there. The Marquise recognized that here, indeed, was her chance, and having made preparations for the journey, she met her lover, who handed her a certain poison prepared for him from a prescription which he had furnished by Christopher Glaser, an apothecary formerly connected with the Court.

Everything went smoothly. The servants were sent away on a pleasure-trip to Paris. The Marquise herself served the dinner. Previously she had introduced the poison to several of the dishes. Monsieur d'Aubray swallowed a few spoonfuls of the soup, and immediately was seized with violent internal pains.

He begged Marie to fetch a doctor. She was ready with her excuses. The house was empty except for themselves—there was no servant to dispatch for a physician. D'Aubray, frantic with agony, urged her to go. She went, returning after some time with the story that the solitary doctor in the village was unable to come till morning. Then she helped the wretched man to bed, and sat with him throughout the night, pretending to comfort him.

At eight o'clock next morning the doctor, a stupid country practitioner, arrived. He

diagnosed the trouble as indigestion and prescribed a simple purgative. However, by that time Monsieur d'Aubray was growing anxious. He refused to remain at Compiègne, insisting on returning at once to Paris where he might have his own physician.

The Marquise was more than agreeable to this suggestion, for it exactly suited her schemes. The breaking-up of the continuity was entirely in her favour. For the two doctors would have no opportunity of comparing notes, the exactness of the symptoms and their progress would be a matter of hazy conjecture.

Everything fell out as she had hoped and expected. After four days of agony the miserable man died, passing away in the arms of his daughter, blessing her as he went. She cried, sobbed, became almost hysterical, playing her part to perfection.

Monsieur d'Aubray having been a person of some importance (a councillor and at one time a Minister of State), the authorities thought fit to hold an autopsy on his body. No trace of a poisonous substance was found in any of the organs. The secret poison, whose composition had been revealed by Exili to Sainte Croix, had proved its powers of invisibility!

Not for a moment did suspicion fall upon the Marquise. Nor was there any apparent reason why suspicion *should* have fallen. To all appearance, she was the heartbroken daughter, exhausted with grief. All supreme criminals are usually good mummers. The facileness of their temperaments makes for versatility and ease of emotions.

There is little doubt that this success of her



first experiment with poisons, and the ease with which the crime was accomplished, caused the Marquise to find a certain satisfaction in her newly-found weapon.

Having acquired her portion of the dead man's estate and having consumed the larger part of it with her lover, the Marquise now plotted with Sainte Croix to secure the entire fortune by the wholesale destruction of the remainder of her family, the two brothers and her young sister. In order to secure this end, the conspirators took into their confidence a certain La Chaussée, a valet in the house of the d'Aubrays.

This man appears to have been a ready-made scoundrel. Irritated by some trivial action of the brothers, and anxious to gain the huge bribe that was promised, he readily undertook to carry out the crime when an opportunity came to his hand.

By this time, however, the Marquise was developing a sort of cunning prudence. It occurred to her that if her brothers and sister exhibited symptoms similar to those which had attacked her father, a certain suspicion might at once arise. She decided, therefore, to delay the destruction of her relatives until she had experimented with new weapons.

She made the first test on her maid, Francine Roussel. Sainte Croix, having sent Madame a certain poison which he assured her would defy analysis, she placed a portion of it in some mutton and some fruit pie, the remains of her own meal which the maid usually ate. The girl was immediately seized with horrible pains. An emetic was given by a doctor, hastily summoned, and

she recovered after a number of hours. The doctor diagnosed indigestion, and the episode travelled no further.

It had served its purpose, however, for it had shown the Marquise that the dose given was not adequate. She resolved to make further experiments. It is clear that from the outset the woman was a deliberate criminal. There was something almost academic in her methods.

Presently it occurred to her that a hospital would form an excellent background for her tests. Nor would her visits arouse suspicion. What more natural than that a great lady should sometimes go on an errand of mercy to the Hôtel Dieu, taking with her flowers, fruits, and other offerings for the patients?

The doctors were enchanted with Madame's gracious manners, her delicious voice, her solicitous interest in their charges. They welcomed her with enthusiasm, and frequently she was left alone with the sufferers.

The poisoner carefully noted the names of the patients to whom she gave the impregnated chocolates, fruits, and cakes. This action was prompted by her desire to ascertain exactly which of them survived and which died. She varied the doses—giving a few grains to one patient and double the quantity to another.

Very soon the doctors of the Hôtel Dieu found themselves faced with a mysterious and appalling sickness. Their patients were seized with lethargy—a horrible creeping fatigue. There were no symptoms of a painful nature—the patients merely went from weariness to intense fatigue, then into lethargy, and finally into death.

Autopsies were made with the most scrupulous care, but no sign of any poisonous substance was discovered. The victims were hurried into the earth, and no further investigations followed.

The Marquise was more than satisfied. She had achieved her end. She had ascertained exactly the dose required to kill; moreover, she was now confident that she had nothing to fear, for the art of Exili had undoubtedly evolved a drug that eluded analysis in the post-mortem examination.

She was now living openly with her lover, for the Marquis had left Paris in order to evade his many creditors. Together Sainte Croix and his mistress proceeded to arrange the murder of the three persons who intervened between themselves and the d'Aubray estate.

La Chaussée soon set to work, stimulated by the promise of a very considerable bribe. Brought into the most intimate contact daily with the brothers, he had many opportunities of carrying out his commission. The double crime was effected with perfect ease, and no suspicion was aroused.

Madame de Brinvilliers and her accomplice, Sainte Croix, had now rid themselves of the senior d'Aubray and his two sons. Only the daughter remained, and the obliging La Chaussée was charged with her removal. In this case, however, the attempt failed.

The chroniclers leave us in doubt as to the cause of the failure. It is possible that there was some bungling. Perhaps the girl instinctively developed a sort of suspicion that evil influences were at work in the house. She may have been very much on her guard. She died, a few

years after the abortive attempt, of natural causes.

And now the Marquise, having tasted the power of the poisoner, began to relish the work for its own sake. No longer did she seek to remove only those persons who stood between herself and her schemes. She dealt out destruction broadcast.

No man, no woman was safe. Secure in her passionate egotism and the infallibility of her weapons, she became a wholesale murderess. The smallest trifle served as a pretext for destruction. A woman seated beside her at a reception chanced to make a jesting remark that annoyed the Marquise. A few days later that woman died in agonies. Another woman who enraged Madame by accidentally spilling some coffee over her gown was laughingly reprov'd and invited to dinner on the following day. Into her coffee the poison was introduced, and she paid the penalty of her carelessness. People who merely bored the Marquise with weak jokes or long-winded conversation were likewise dispatched by her to a region where neither their jests nor their platitudes could offend.

Meantime, she went her way, joyous, witty, her eyes sparkling, her lips framing compliments whilst her brain stalked new victims. Never had she seemed so beautiful, so winning, so gentle, so affectionate. Sainte Croix still remained her lover *en titre*, but apparently she entertained several other men in a subordinate capacity.

When the Marquise wearied of those lovers, when they became importunate, she fell back upon her invariable remedy against boredom. One by one they vanished, whilst she herself continued

upon her course, unsuspected, a laugh upon her lips.

At length the unexpected happened. It happened with tragic abruptness. For Sainte Croix, experimenting in his secret laboratory with certain poisons, fell a victim to the fumes. It had been his habit to wear a glass-mask when thus engaged. The glass smashed and he was immediately overpowered.

He died within a few hours of the accident. The authorities arrived at the house and at once proceeded to institute a search for his will and other personal documents. A casket crammed with sealed packages was presently discovered. There was, moreover, a letter urging that in the event of his death the entire contents of the casket should be immediately sent, unopened, to Madame de Brinvilliers, at the Rue Neuve St. Paul.

However, the authorities had been rendered suspicious by the manner of his death. They resolved to open the sealed packages. This was done. Each package contained a drug, afterwards recognized as a subtle poison.

We have already said that Exili had succeeded in preparing a formula for a poison that would evade detection in the organs. The report of the analysis upon this drug is intriguing.

"This artful and subtle poison" [writes the chemist] "has been subjected to a long experiment. Contrary to the habit of other poisonous substances it swims in water and it eludes the test of fire, leaving only an innocent residue. After experimenting with animals, no trace

could be found in any of the organs. All parts remained sound, but the beasts perished. . . ."

After the discovery and analysis of the contents of the casket events began to move rapidly. La Chaussée, the valet, having been named by Sainte Croix in certain of the letters as a go-between, was immediately arrested and questioned under severe torture. Silent for some time, the man eventually confessed that he had frequently conveyed poisons from Sainte Croix to Madame de Brinvilliers. Moreover, he admitted his part in the murder of the two brothers d'Aubray, but swore that he was merely an agent for the woman. His trial followed (a mere formal proceeding). He was found guilty, sentenced, and a few days later was broken on the wheel, one of the most painful methods of execution invented by an age that loved justice a little but vengeance a great deal more.

Three actors passed thus from the stage of this drama. Sainte Croix was dead, a victim of his own instruments; La Chaussée was executed; and Exili had vanished from France. There remained only the Marquise, and for her this was the beginning of the last epoch.

She planned things cleverly, swiftly. Having made frantic efforts to gain possession of the casket, she abandoned the attempt and resolved to go into hiding. Disguised as a peasant the ingenious Marquise travelled to Liège. She found shelter in a convent, winning over the Mother Superior and the nuns with her usual diplomacy and charm. Very soon she became enveloped in a religious ardour that was apparently sincere. She was loved by every person in the convent. Naturally,

her identity with the notorious accomplice of Sainte Croix was not suspected.

The movements of justice in the seventeenth century were slow, cumbersome, ineffective. A criminal who contrived to put a good distance between himself and his pursuers frequently escaped without much trouble. Thus it happened that for three years the woman lay secure in the convent. Doubtless she told herself that her security would never be impaired.

However, the power that controls the unexpected seems to have had a spite against Madame la Marquise. First of all, there was the accident to her lover—and after three years' immunity from capture she was caught by a freak of coincidence.

Desgrais, a young police officer, zealous, energetic, resourceful, was informed by a friend who had returned from Liège that he had fallen in love with a young woman whose face he had seen at a convent window. The amorous youth insisted in describing the exact appearance of his Circe. Immediately Desgrais, acting partly on judgement, partly perhaps on intuition, formed the idea that the woman was possibly the person for whom he was seeking. Moreover, his knowledge of the Marquise, acquired during his early investigations at the time of the trial of La Chaussée, told him that refuge in a religious house was exactly the idea that would have occurred to her. He went at once to Liège; but, arrived there, found himself faced with a problem.

Even assuming that his belief was correct, he could hardly enter the building and arrest the woman on suspicion. He therefore decided to

play a part. He was young, good-looking, and had a facile tongue. Assuming the clothing of a priest, he entered the convent as a confessor. Introduced to Madame, he recognized her immediately as the person for whose arrest he held a warrant under his cassock.

The arrest, of course, could not be made in that place. Once again he played a part. This time he posed as priest-lover. Encouraged by her smiles, he suggested a meeting in the woods on the outskirts of the town.

The Marquise agreed without hesitation, not sorry perhaps to be courted by this charming young priest. Desgrais then left the convent and made his preparations. Soon after dusk the woman came from the building. Desgrais had his men ready. They pounced upon the unsuspecting Marquise, and the arrest was carried out before she had time to realize the trick.

The supposed priest had done more than make love to the prisoner. Whilst in her room at the convent he had contrived to send her away for a few minutes on some errand to the Superior. During her absence he had searched the apartment. Under the bed he had actually found a sealed envelope containing a confession, not only of a number of murders but, moreover, of unnatural sins against morality. Judged by this confession Madame de Brinvilliers stood revealed as a Messalina of the most lurid type.

On the way to Paris she made an attempt to kill herself by forcing the fragments of a wine-glass down her throat. Her captors, however, applied some rough treatment, and she speedily recovered.



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After that incident her hands and feet were bound. Arrived in Paris the Marquise was at once driven to the gaol, where she remained for a very long time whilst the formalities connected with the trial and the marshalling of the evidence were arranged.

In former centuries there was often a huge delay in the interval between the arrest of the accused and the trial. Sometimes months, sometimes years, would pass before the wretched creature faced his accusers. On the other hand, there was indecent haste in the swiftness of the execution that followed a condemnation. The strangling, burning, or decapitation was frequently a matter of a few hours.

Madame remained untried for several months. When at length the trial began she caused what modern reporters would call a "sensation" by withdrawing in its entirety the confession found at Liège.

Her counsel made an ingenious, if somewhat futile, attempt to explain away this document. In effect, this is what he said:

"We have here a woman who flies from Paris and takes refuge in a convent, knowing that she is suspected of certain terrible crimes. She is innocent, but the suspicion of guilt has preyed so strongly upon a susceptible and half-distraught brain that in an hour of madness she sets down an imaginary confession. . . ."

It is said that this plea caused amusement in the court, and that even the judges smiled. For in view of the nature of the evidence it was a farcical attempt.

Witness after witness told a convincing story.

First of all there was a police-sergeant, Cluet, a big, honest-faced fellow, with square jaw and Norman eyes. His evidence made a strong impression.

He deposed to the watch he had kept for some time on the house of Sainte Croix. He stated that very often he had seen the valet, La Chaussée, leave that house bearing small packages, which the man conveyed to the residence of the prisoner. Invariably mysterious deaths followed in her circle of friends.

The maid was then called. Crying bitterly, she related how Madame had once given her the queerly-tasting mutton and fruit pie, and how, after eating those foods, she had been immediately seized by sharp pains.

Both witnesses were severely cross-examined, but their evidence remained unaffected.

Other witnesses followed, deposing to trivial matters, each of them unimportant in itself, but entirely damning to the Marquise when cumulatively viewed.

The sensation of the trial was provided by the mistress of Christopher Glaser, the chemist. For Glaser had formerly been a Court apothecary; queer stories were told concerning his services to royal patrons.

The woman deposed that on a number of occasions she saw Madame de Brinvilliers at the house of Sainte Croix, where the latter handed her certain packages. Indeed, Madame's footman had frequently suggested jokingly that she had come there to buy poisonous drugs. The witness, moreover, said that she had overheard conversations

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with Sainte Croix that clearly pointed to the sinister nature of the visits.

Evidence was given by Desgrais, who swore to the discovery of the confession at Liège. He related how the prisoner whilst journeying to Paris when under arrest had told him she was aware that Glaser had often concocted poisons for Sainte Croix. She added, however, that the latter had never allowed her to handle the drugs.

The trial wore to its end. Throughout its passage the Marquise remained calm, confident. She smiled affectionately on her friends in the court-room; she sent little *billets-doux* of encouragement to her advocate, who was doing his utmost to save a hopeless cause.

The jury went out, but returned after a very brief interval. They found the prisoner guilty of the murder of her father, her two brothers, and of attempting the life of her sister.

The sentence, however, was deferred. Madame de Brinvilliers was removed from the court and taken to the cell, where she was to remain until the judges had arrived at a decision concerning her fate.

She was in the gayest mood. Death still seemed a distant thing. There was the possibility that a term of imprisonment might be substituted for the capital penalty. The convicted criminal is nearly always an optimist.

The behaviour of the Marquise during the time that elapsed between the trial and her execution has moved the astonishment of her own and subsequent generations.

They said of her in the prison that she behaved like an "angel". The warders loved her; they

brought her delicacies forbidden by the prison regulations. One of them actually declared that he would willingly suffer in her place.

Her confessor, Pirot, a man of exceptionally sweet character, seems also to have fallen under the sway of this amazing woman. He said that he found it hard to believe in her guilt. There was that in her voice, manner, conversation, that suggested a guileless and even saint-like character.

Her gentleness, her kindness, was constantly being manifested. A fly was found floating in her milk. She rescued it, and would not eat or drink until the tiny thing had recovered the use of its wings. A warder gashed his hand with a nail. Instantly Madame bound up the wound. A wardress who had lost a relative was found sobbing. Madame comforted her so graciously that the woman swore she was incapable of the crimes of which she stood convicted.

Pirot and his penitent appear to have enjoyed many long talks, talks frequently impregnated with theological musings. They discussed the possibilities of life after death. Madame maintained her belief in a hereafter and in the forgiveness of sins.

On July 16th, 1676, at an early hour, the Marquise was roused and ordered to dress. They told her that the sentence of the court would be communicated to her in a few hours.

She became pale for a moment, but quickly smiled and began to dress, making a careful toilet. Food was brought. Some friends visiting her as she was eating, Madame begged them to join, apologizing for the meagreness of the breakfast.

From the cell to the torture-chamber, where the sentence was to be rehearsed to her, was a walk of a few minutes. Officials filed into the room. The clerk arrived and immediately read out the pronouncement.

"The court condemns Madeline Marie Madeline d'Aubray de Brinvilliers to make public apology for her crimes before the door of the principal church in Paris, holding in her hand a lighted torch of the weight of 2lbs. There, on her knees, she shall declare that in order to possess their goods she poisoned her father, her two brothers, and attempted the life of her sister, of all of which she repents and asks pardon of God, the King, and the Law. This done she shall be immediately conveyed to the Place de la Grève of this city, and there her head shall be cut off, her body burned, and the ashes thrown to the winds. She is first to be put to the question, ordinary and extraordinary, to obtain a disclosure of her accomplices."

(The questions under torture were usually administered before and after trial. It was held that many accused persons who would not confess whilst there remained a chance of acquittal would, perhaps, admit their crimes when execution was a certain thing.)

The torture followed immediately. She was taken to a room under the court, and there placed on the rack. She refused to speak. She was then removed from the rack. The water torment was applied.

Even in that sharp moment of agony the Marquise retained her self-possession. On seeing the cans of water, she said to the executioner:

"That is a very large quantity for a small person like myself. I cannot drink it all, and perhaps it is intended to drown me."

However, after a few minutes, the agony forced her to speak. "My God! You are killing me!" she whispered. Then she begged them to cease, saying that she would reveal all she knew.

"Accomplices! I have had none excepting those who have been named," she told them. "Sainte croix and La Chaussée. Both are dead. I cannot remember the composition of the poisons. I remember only toad's venom. I know nothing of antidotes. I did not use them. But milk might have served well for that purpose."

That was sufficient. Perceiving that nothing further was travelling from the pale lips, they unbound her, preparing her for the last journey.

A coarse shift was flung over the naked body and she was hurried into a tumbril. When the cortège arrived at the church of Notre Dame, a torch was thrust into her hand. She was dragged into the nave, her flesh still all a-quiver from the torture, and having knelt down, the wretched condemned repeated after the Registrar these words:

"I confess that wickedly and for revenge and to secure possession of their fortunes I poisoned my father and two brothers and tried to destroy my sister. I now ask pardon of God, the King, and the Law of my country."

The tumbril was then re-entered. With Pirot, the priest, beside her, she was driven to the Place de la Grève. On the way she remarked to her confessor:

"You must not blame my husband for not

coming to see me in prison, for he would have come had he not been anxious to conceal his whereabouts from those who would injure him. Nevertheless, I wonder how he can continue living whilst these things are happening to me."

The Place was filled with a crowd so huge that Madame de Sevigné, who appears to have taken a vivid interest in the career of Brinvilliers, wrote at a later time that many narrowly escaped being crushed to death.

On arrival at the place of execution the Marquise asked the priest to accompany her on the scaffold and to hold her hand in his own until the moment of death. He consented, weeping, and immediately gave her absolution. She then knelt down and prayed:

"O Jesus, son of Mary and David, have mercy on me. I abandon my body to the dust that men may burn it in the firm faith that I shall arise one day and be united with my flesh. Grant, O God, when I yield up my soul to Thee that it may enter into rest and receive it into thy bosom. From Thee it came and to Thee it now returns."

She rose, embraced the priest, and then turned to the executioner. The man and his assistant then showed her how she was to place her head upon the block, and she knelt down beside it with great calmness. The priest averted his head, and at the same moment heard a sound which resembled the falling of a chopper on some dull substance.

The executioner did his work speedily. The head was severed at the first stroke. Then the

man turned to the priest and said with satisfaction:

"That was a good stroke, sir, was it not? On these occasions I always offer up a prayer for success, and the good God has aided me."

So justice was done and the drama finished. Next day, writes Madame de Sevigné, after the body had been burned, hundreds of simple folk gathered round the place, searching for charred bones to preserve as relics. Some of them put forward the strange theory that Madame de Brinvilliers had been a saint!

It has been easy to record the deeds of this woman. Not so easy, however, to formulate a doctrine as to her mentality and motives. For whilst it is clear that greed urged the murders of her relatives, there seems no obvious motive for the many casual crimes that she committed.

That she was sane enough in the common sense is fairly certain. Her control, her equanimity, do not savour of the madhouse. We must look for the chief motives elsewhere; they are probably the forces that drive all deliberate criminals.

For these strange people take the line of least resistance. An enemy, or perhaps a mere vexatious person, is in the way. The non-criminal brain seeks some strategic method of changing the situation. Not so the professional killer. Instinctively he sees the knife, the bullet, the poison. The process is simple, he reasons, why trouble to take a long route round? In our own time we see the same truth emphasized. We ask ourselves "Why did not the murderer do this or that?"



He had many ways of getting clear of his enemy Why did he kill him?" *He killed because murder is so easy.*

This woman, this Brinvilliers, was callous as Nature itself, and Nature, as we know, takes ever the line of least resistance. One asks oneself, however, whether she had not sometimes her bad moments. One wonders what must have been her emotions in the long wastes of the night when she must have lain awake and thought about her crimes. At that hour, when vitality is at its lowest, when the mask that each one wears in the day is dropped, what thoughts, what remorse came to her? Or was the distorted brain capable of nothing but triumph in the knowledge of guilty acts accomplished and apparently hidden for ever from justice?

That she was an egotist, and a lover of soft existence, we know. She hated quarrels, hated the clash of temperament. In her control of poisons she probably saw a method of making life facile, smooth. Moreover, in the later stages there is small doubt that the use of these weapons came to be a sort of obsession. Could she have rid herself of some troublesome person by legitimate means, it is more than conceivable that she would have chosen the favourite means of destruction.

Sainte Croix has been blamed by some historians as the tempter but for whom the Marquise might never have become a criminal. One imagines, however, that he was the instrument rather than the instigator.

The piety of Marie de Brinvilliers during her last days of life is not a novel feature in the records of crime. In our own day we have the

most callous murderers showing precisely similar signs. Only the President of the Immortal (in *Æschylean* phrase) can decide how little or how much of usefulness lies in these late repentances.

The physical beauty of the Marquise in youth and early middle age was remarkable. She is described as having possessed a small oval face, with luminous eyes of exceeding softness and brilliance. Her figure was of middle-size, neither plump nor slender. Her mouth was small, voluptuous.

She loved her body! In her last hours she confided to the priest that the execution did not trouble her, but that she loathed the contemplation of the burning to ashes that would follow.

Why? Was this the egotism of the criminal persisting to the doors of death, the egotism that revolted against the annihilation of the body that had drunk the wine of life, that had revelled in the triumph of the flesh?



CATHERINE HAYES

1690-1726



## CATHERINE HAYES

1690-1726

THE everlasting and somewhat wearisome triangle of husband, wife, and lover is varied in the appalling story of Catherine Hayes. This is the record of a sordid "quadrangle", wherein two men acting in concert with a young and attractive wife murdered the husband in circumstances so revolting that a sensation of physical nausea is excited in them that read the history.

Thackeray who, like many humorists, had a taste for the morbid side of life, has celebrated this woman in a study impact of observation and satire. Catherine Hayes has found, also, a place in the dignified pages of the Dictionary of National Biography. In this connection it is interesting to note the fact that a criminal of far more note—a man who in his own way was something of a genius—has escaped a resting-place in this Valhalla. There is no record, not even a single line, concerning Charles Peace in the Dictionary. Why Peace was excluded and Catherine Hayes admitted, one cannot imagine, unless it be that the circumstances which attended this woman's crime seemed sufficiently notable to justify the action. However, whatever the motive of the

editors, the record of Catherine stands everlastingly in the classic pages, from which many a worthy (if minor) poet, musician, painter, and actor has been severely excluded.

A village in Warwickshire, a village of lanes with high hedges, a village akin to the Stratford where Shakespeare was born, was the birthplace of Catherine Hayes. Her parentage appears to have been entirely decent. The father and mother were hard-working religious persons. They sent the child to school—a fact that suggests that they were not people of the poorest class, for education in the seventeenth century was not within the range of the poor. However, Catherine refused to show any absorbing interest in the pursuit of scholarship. She was the dunce of her class, a distinction which she shared with Isaac Newton and other of her contemporaries.

She ran wild. She made love to youths in the neighbourhood, and knew the evil things of life at an age when normal children are still fondling dolls and running after hoops. She was merely fifteen years old when she eloped with a party of young officers from a regiment quartered near her village. Whether this elopement was on the basis of a simple flight from home, or whether there were amorous passages between herself and one or more of the men, one cannot determine.

However, whatever the relations between Catherine and her escort, they ended with the abruptness usually associated with military operations, whether in the fields of war or courtship. Within a few days of her flight the girl was deserted and the soldiers had marched away. In the tiny town of Great Ombersley, the girl went

from house to house, trying to obtain food and shelter. Eventually she came upon a friend—a Mrs. Hayes. This woman immediately formed an interest in the girl, received her into the house, gave her food and bed, and allowed her to remain there indefinitely, her position being that of half-companion, half-servant.

John Hayes, the son of this woman, coming home that night, saw Catherine seated by the fire, and immediately formed a violent attachment. He was a very young man, barely twenty years old, and there is no doubt that this girl of fifteen possessed enormous physical attractions.

Within a few weeks the youth had proposed marriage. Catherine agreed immediately, but suggested that the ceremony should be performed secretly in order that his parents might not be enraged by the suddenness of the affair. She was acute enough to see that John was very largely dependent on father and mother. A penniless husband did not appeal to her. Even at that age, when she was little more than a child, the girl was cold, calculating, mercenary.

It was arranged that they should travel to Worcester and there be married. Quitting the house of Mrs. Hayes on a fictitious errand (from the first Catherine was a ready and glib liar), the girl accompanied the youth to that town. There she fell in with several of the officers who had persuaded her to leave her home. When they were informed of her marriage, they planned a jest. They would seize Hayes and pretend to impress him for the Army. They would then blackmail him, obtain from him or from his father certain sums which they would share with



Catherine. She appears to have agreed to this scandalous proposal, and the arrest duly took place.

However, matters did not fall out exactly as the scoundrels had proposed. For, when Mr. Hayes arrived with the cash with which he proposed to buy off his son, he was received, not by the friends of Catherine, but by a senior officer, who immediately recognized that a trick had been played upon the country youth. Young Hayes was given his freedom, and Mr. Hayes returned to Warwickshire.

Catherine, however, was disgusted by this failure of the scheme, for she had set her hopes upon John serving his country in order that she might travel with him and see something of the world. To this end, she suggested to him that he should voluntarily enlist in a marching regiment. Hayes, apparently a good-natured, pliant person, obeyed, and for several years Catherine followed his regiment to various parts of the country.

The military career of Hayes ended in the Isle of Wight. Growing weary of the lazy life of a soldier, and perhaps still more weary of the discipline, he secured his discharge by means of his father's exchequer, and settled down with his young wife in the country. It is probable that Worcestershire was the county in which the following six years were spent, but the chronicler uses the phrase "in the country", and gives nothing further in the way of situation.

It is conceivable that the move to London, which was their next abode, was proposed by the restless Catherine, who loathed remaining in one place for any length of time. For a time they

stayed in Tottenham Court Road, moving afterwards (in the year 1725) to a house in the Tyburn Road. In view of the events that occurred in that house, the choice of the Tyburn Road was singularly appropriate. Tyburn, adjacent to the spot where the Marble Arch now stands, was for many years the place of criminal executions.

The husband and wife lived on an allowance paid by Hayes's father, supplemented by sundry money-lending transactions which John, evidently a man of some business ability, carried on with huge success. Indeed, so excellent were his dealings that he soon amassed a large sum. It is probable that Catherine was largely influenced in her subsequent behaviour by the desire to handle what must have been to her peasant brain an enormous amount of cash.

Whilst living in Tyburn Road the young woman made the acquaintance of a tailor, Thomas Billings. Billings then began to visit the house under the pretence that he was a relative of Mrs. Hayes. He was welcomed by Hayes, and after a few weeks took up his residence as a sort of informal lodger.

Almost simultaneously, another man, Thomas Wood, a former neighbour of the Hayeses, came to live under their accommodating roof. His pretext was to the effect that he feared being captured by a press-gang. One imagines, however, that the amorous Catherine had met him in some dark corner of the town and had suggested that he should pursue his flirtation at close quarters.

(And here the writer breaks off to offer an explanation of certain assumptions on his part. There is nothing in the chronicle to imply

definitely that Catherine behaved thus, but the inference certainly lies in that direction. The chronicler baldly states that a certain thing happened. He assigns no reason for the happening. In order to throw light on the circumstances, to elucidate motives and events, some assumptions of the sort must be made. After all, why should a man seek one roof rather than another to avoid a press-gang? The motive seems on the face of it a mere pretence. In view of the character and tendencies of Catherine Hayes, the theory put forward by the writer would certainly seem the most feasible and the most convincing.)

That both men made love to Catherine there is no doubt whatever. Moreover, they appear to have been quite content to share her coarse favours. Their passion was probably of that accommodating sort which views love merely as an accompaniment to food, lodging, and drink. Here was a good-looking young woman with a husband frequently away from town, a young woman who was ready to fondle both of them and to fill them with material comforts. They would have been fools to quarrel over a mere question of jealousy. As a matter of fact, no quarrels occurred; and it is possible that all would have gone smoothly had not Catherine, growing utterly sick of John Hayes, and casting ardent eyes at his property, decided that he was no longer necessary to her well-being.

If ever a murder was deliberately planned, this murder was of that order. Here was no impulsive act, no sudden gust of passion. Catherine Hayes resolved to destroy her husband—a man who had treated her with indulgence and affection—exactly



CATHERINE HAYES



as another woman might have resolved to give her house a spring-cleaning. The simile is perhaps brutal in its triteness, but it fits the circumstances.

Having discussed the scheme with her two lovers she decided to wait for a good opportunity. The opportunity came quickly enough. For it chanced that one afternoon, Hayes, returning from the country after performing a good stroke of business, was in exceptionally joyous mood. The conversation between himself and his tenants having drifted towards the subject of strong drink (a frequent discussion, doubtless, in that house), he vowed that he could drink a gallon-and-a-half of red wine without showing signs of drunkenness.

Catherine instantly perceived her chance. She sent one of the men for the wine. He returned with two gallons. In order, however, that no undue risks might be taken in reducing Hayes to stupor, she supplemented the wine with three or four bottles of strong ale.

Hayes, probably a vain fellow, anxious to display his powers, tossed off the liquors. In less than twenty minutes he was in an unconscious state. They carried him to his bedroom, and placed him on the bed. Then they retired to the adjoining room to discuss the method of killing him.

Billings, who appears to have been the more courageous ruffian of the pair of lodgers, fetched a coal-hatchet from the cellar. Entering the bedroom he leaned over the drugged wretch and gave him half a dozen heavy blows upon the skull. The shock apparently brought Hayes to his senses. Leaping from the bed, he stamped

wildly on the floor in his agony. Wood, hearing the noise, and fearful lest the people in the house might be alarmed, rushed into the room and dealt further blows. After a short struggle Hayes collapsed upon the bed and died without uttering a coherent word.

Hardly had he expired when a loud knocking sounded at the door of the outer room. Mrs. Hayes coolly opened it, and found there Mrs. Springate, a woman who occupied the floor below. She inquired the reason of the noise. Catherine said at once that her husband had been entertaining friends and had drunk more than was good for him. This explanation satisfied the woman, and she returned to her room.

And now, the three were faced with the problem which must assail all murderers when their crime is committed, not in an open space or in a house where they are unknown, but in their own home. How was the body to be disposed of?

A terrible problem this! It affects different temperaments in different ways. We have the cool, calculating criminal who has arranged everything beforehand, even to the detail of having ready a trunk or other receptacle to receive the body. On the other hand, we have the terrified, half-dazed degenerate who in his panic commits some mad blunder that leads to his capture within a week. One imagines that in the case of the imaginative and nervous criminal, this problem must cause more agony of mind than the trial, the sentence, and the other horrors that follow the detection of his crime.

Mrs. Hayes appears to have belonged to the former class. Quietly, and even casually, if we

may credit the story revealed in the subsequent confession of her accomplices, she sat down to arrange the procedure. Eventually she made the suggestion that the head should be cut off. She pointed out that if head and body were disposed of separately, the chances of identification would be reduced to a minimum.

Thomas Wood undertook the ghastly business. The woman fetched a pail, which was placed close to the bed to receive the blood. Wood then drew the body some way from the couch, so that the head might droop over the pail. The decapitation was then done by means of a penknife. A strange weapon for the purpose. The task must have been long and difficult. One cannot help wondering how a man who until that time had been a mere lazy loafer, but harmless enough in his way, could have brought himself to this butchery. There is only one explanation. His will was merged in the will of the woman. She had played upon his affection for her, had stirred his avarice, moreover, by hinting that he and Billings should share the considerable fortune that she would acquire on the death of her husband.

With a cold-bloodedness that was characteristic, Mrs. Hayes proposed that the head should be boiled until nothing of it remained. The men vetoed this suggestion. They hinted that the process would occupy too long a time. Perhaps, however, they were already sickening of the horror in which they had taken part.

Eventually it was decided that the ghastly thing should be placed in a small pail, and that Billings and his companion should leave



the house at once in order to fling it in the river.

They went at once to Whitehall. The gates were closed for the night, and they could not penetrate to the Thames. They then proceeded to the Horse Ferry at Westminster, close to the spot where Horseferry Road lies at the present time.

Of what did they talk during that dreary journey from the Tyburn Road to the river? The journey stretched over several miles. The night was bleak night of winter. Did they gossip lightly concerning the woman who had made herself cheap to them both, or did they speak in voices husky with fear of the thing they had done an hour or two before? Or was there silence—harsh, accusing silence? It is possible, perhaps, that their talk concentrated on the business in hand—on the concealment of the dumb staring thing they carried to its hiding-place.

The tide was at its ebb. This dismayed them, for they knew that the head would remain in the dock and not be carried out. However, they could not face the prospect of the return journey with that burden still within their grasp. Covered by the darkness of the dock, they flung the skull into the deep water, and then went back swiftly to Tyburn Road.

That night they did not go to bed, but remained with Catherine, dozing at intervals. Perhaps each feared to leave the other. When there is a concerted murder, each culprit dreads lest his accomplice shall do or say that which may lead to detection. The sage who wrote that the way of transgressors is hard had a fairly

intimate knowledge of his subject. It is always hard, and the criminal game is never worth the candle that lights it.

On 2nd March of that year, 1726, a watchman named Robinson, employed in the docks by the Horse Ferry, saw a blood-smeared pail and head floating in a corner of the wharf. Some lightermen who were nearby then recalled how a night or two previously they had seen two men, one of whom had apparently flung some article into the dock. However, no attention at the time had been paid to the incident, for people, after the fashion of those insanitary days, frequently used the docks as a sort of rubbish-depository.

The head of John Hayes was immediately conveyed to the offices of the local Justices of the Peace. By their orders it was cleaned and then set up on a high post in the churchyard of St. Margaret's, Westminster, a church associated to-day with the weddings of notable people. Officers were stationed beside the post ready to receive the statements of any person who recognized the water-soddened features.

Almost simultaneously with the finding of the head Mrs. Hayes arranged with her lovers for the disposal of the trunk and limbs. The body was carefully dismembered. Sections were wrapped in blankets and then taken at night to Marylebone Fields, where they were dropped into a deep pond. The men carried their burdens under their huge greatcoats.

Thousands of curious people came to view the head at St. Margaret's. For several days it went unrecognized. Eventually, a young apprentice

who had known Hayes intimately called on Catherine and hinted that there was an extraordinary likeness between the features of the strange "exhibit" and the features of her husband. The woman flew into a rage, told him that he might find himself in a very dangerous position if he ventured to rouse any suspicion concerning Hayes who, at that moment, was safe in his own house. The youth, terrified, went away, resolved to have nothing further to do with the business.

About the same time a man named Samuel Patrick, whilst drinking in a tavern in Monmouth Street, where Hayes and his wife had been well-known, happened to comment on the likeness of the dead face in the churchyard to John Hayes. Billings, who was in the tavern at that moment, laughed away the remark. It was impossible, he said, that Hayes's head could be on the post in Westminster, seeing that he had that very morning exchanged banter with him at home.

The next episode in this sordid affair occurred one evening in March when a man and his servant, walking through Marylebone Fields, perceived certain strange things floating in a pond. Investigation showed these things to be arms and legs of a man. The pond was dragged and the trunk was recovered. The authorities at once came to the conclusion that the body was that of the man whose head had thus far gone unidentified.

And now events began to move rapidly. On 4th March, Mr. Longmore, a cousin of Hayes, visited Catherine and inquired concerning her husband. She said that he was out walking

and might not be home for some time. Her manner aroused a certain suspicion in Longmore, who appears to have been an acute sort of person.

Further suspicion was awakened when it became evident that the woman was endeavouring to realize certain effects of her husband. Catherine was greedy for money. She made a false step in hurrying matters. Had she waited, had she given out that Hayes had mysteriously vanished, played her part well, and patiently bided her time, then there is the possibility that the crime might have gone undiscovered. But the fact that she was already behaving in a way that would only have been justified by the man's death naturally caused the tongues of many persons to wag with more than usual criticism.

Moreover, she began to vary her stories. It is said that the liar should have a good memory. Mrs. Hayes's memory was her weakest asset. To different persons she told different fables. To one she said that Hayes had gone for a long sojourn in the country; to others that he remained all day in bed; and to some that he had gone abroad to escape justice, after killing a man in a drunken brawl. To a friend of the dead man, Joseph Ashby, she confided this story, naming Portugal as the place to which the fugitive had escaped.

Now it happened that Longmore and Ashby were acquainted. Meeting in a tavern, they discussed the affair. Together they went at once to the house where Mrs. Hayes was now staying at some little distance from the place in Tyburn Road where the crime had been done. Confronted by two men, to each of whom she had

told diverse tales, she stammered, hesitated, contradicted herself, went pale with fright. They came away at length, having formed certain definite conclusions.

They then went to Longmore's house and discussed the situation. A chance remark of Ashby's concerning the head that had been exposed at Westminster decided the men to go there at once. When they arrived at St. Margaret's they found that the relic had been removed from the post and had been taken to the Justice's office, where it was preserved in alcohol.

After some formalities they were admitted to the room. One glance at the head convinced them that their suspicions were justified. Each of them was prepared to swear that he recognized the features of John Hayes.

Longmore's next action was to go to his brother's house and seek his aid and advice. This brother appears to have been a man of swift decisions, for he promptly discouraged the suggestion that the matter should be investigated further before action was taken. He pointed out with perfect justice that by this time the woman must be growing uneasy, and that if prompt measures were not taken she might easily escape.

This excellent advice was followed. That same day the brothers went to the house of Mr. Justice Lambert and demanded a warrant for the arrest of Mrs. Hayes for the alleged murder of her husband. Lambert, after hearing their evidence, granted the warrant without a moment's hesitation, saying that he would himself accompany the officers to the house.

There was no time to lose. So slipshod, so absurd were the methods of justice in those times that criminals who escaped from the places where they were known and where they frequented were rarely caught. Recognizing that the woman might easily evade them, the officers went straight that evening to Tyburn Road.

Lambert, accompanied by the Longmores and the officials, was admitted by the landlord, who told him that Mrs. Hayes was in her room upstairs. They went up and rapped sharply at the door. She called out that she was in bed and could not open. Lambert threatened to have the door broken down. The woman then admitted them. The room was pitch dark. However, the light of the lanterns which the men had brought with them revealed a man sitting in the bed. The man was Thomas Billings.

Lambert inquired what was his business in the room at that hour. Mrs. Hayes replied glibly that she was mending for him a stocking. The Justice remarked ironically that her sight must be excellent, seeing that the room held no candle and no fire. Obviously she was lying; and the condition of the man's clothing showed that he had just risen from the bed which she occupied.

Meantime, an officer had searched the house and had arrested the woman Springate who lived on the floor below. Why this woman was implicated, one cannot conjecture. One may perhaps hazard the suggestion that the crude justice of those times took no risks. In a house where a mysterious crime had been arrested, it was no

unusual thing for every inmate to be arrested and questioned. Presently the officers quitted the building, taking with them Catherine, Billings, and Springate, all three handcuffed and bound.

Catherine now determined to play a part. On arrival at the Bridewell she begged to be shown the head of her dead husband. The authorities, thinking perhaps that it might be well to grant this wish in order that her demeanour when confronted with the horrible relic could be observed, took her to the place.

An amazing scene followed. Catherine broke down, wept, and insisted on fondling the head. She called down curses on the hand that had killed John Hayes. Indeed, so cleverly did the woman play her part that she actually became violently hysterical. When she recovered from this emotional display she begged that she might take a lock of hair from the beloved head! The request was not granted.

However, her assumption of innocence did not deceive the magistrates. Immediately after her recovery from a fainting-fit that followed the hysteria, she was severely cross-examined concerning her part in the evanishment of Hayes. She adhered to her story that the man had taken to flight through fear of arrest for homicide.

Meantime, Thomas Wood, who had left London some weeks previously and was living at Greenford in Middlesex, came to Town. The man had heard nothing of the events in connection with the crime. How should he? In a century when wireless, Press Associations, and other methods of news-transmitting were unknown, a

person living only twenty miles from London might be as ignorant of the passage of events there as the Greenland Eskimo. It is difficult for us to realize this fact, but it will help us to understand why and how various crimes went undetected. The coming of the electric telegraph proved perhaps the criminal's most terrible enemy.

Wood went, first of all, to the old lodgings in Tyburn Road to see his mistress. He was informed that she had removed. Immediately he took himself to the new address. There, to his intense amazement, he was arrested before he had been five minutes in the house. The officious Mr. Longmore happened to be making inquiries in the place; and, acting on the assumption that any person who inquired for Catherine Hayes might be an accomplice of her crime, took upon himself the responsibility of giving Wood into custody.

The man, taken by surprise, seemed to have collapsed. Terrified, he stammered out some denial of complicity. He was conducted to the house of Justice Lambert and put through a harsh examination. Later, he was committed to the prison in Tothill Fields.

Two hundred years ago and, indeed, for more than a century later, prisons were places of filth, dissipation, and license. It is true that separate cells were reserved for convicted felons, but those persons, men and women, who were awaiting trial or sentence, mingled with their fellow prisoners in large common rooms. Card-playing, dicing, drinking, smoking, and immoral acts of the most revolting character went on



undisturbed by the gaolers, who frequently themselves took part in the orgies. Gossip from the world outside was brought in by gaolers and by new prisoners.

By means of this gossip the man Wood soon learned what had happened in connection with his accomplices. At once the fellow formed the belief that the case was hopeless and that one or both of them had probably confessed. A complete coward, he resolved to attempt the salvation of his own skin by making a full confession of his part in the affair.

Three Justices were called in to write down the statement. In this rambling long-winded record Wood flung all the guilt upon the woman. One can hardly blame him. The person who expects chivalry from a murderer of this stamp is, indeed, a profound optimist. Wood stated that over and over again Catherine had urged him to kill John Hayes, and that she had plied him with drink to that end.

Then he went on to whimper; said that he had had no peace since the committing of the crime; and that he had come to London with the intention of a surrender. The entire tenor of his confession was to the effect that he was an honest, harmless person, and that he had been demoralized by the stronger will of Catherine Hayes.

Having signed the statement he was committed to Newgate under a strong guard, for by this time the Tyburn Road murder had gained a vivid hold on the public indignation, and the mob that had gathered outside the justice-room were ready to inflict lynch methods upon any one of the guilty trio.

Billings, having been informed of Wood's confession wherein he too was implicated, threw up the sponge, and admitted his part in the affair. Mrs. Springate, the neighbour, being exonerated by both men, she was immediately discharged.

Catherine herself now resolved to make a confession. She was encouraged to do this by the fact that certain persons had told her whilst she lay in prison that she was certain to escape execution, because she had not actually struck the fatal blows. Stupidly enough, the woman actually was impressed by this absurd assurance. Her spirits grew brighter. At worst, she imagined, a term of imprisonment would be the penalty of the crime. She was content that her accomplices should suffer, providing she herself escaped. In spite of this benevolent resignation to the fate of her friends, she still retained an enormous affection for the man Billings, and when seated in the prison chapel beside him on Sunday mornings would kiss him and fondle his hands!

The trial at the Old Bailey was by no means a long affair. It is true that many witnesses were examined, but their evidence was so clear, so convincing, and so impact of concordance one with the other, that the jury could hardly have experienced a single doubt. The three confessions, signed and witnessed, were produced. Gaolers, with whom the woman had gossiped, related snatches of her talk; told how she had said that her husband had treated her cruelly and that the murder was an act of just vengeance. She had also stated that the two accomplices

had been anxious to assist her, had agreed with her that Hayes was not fit to live. And so on, and so on; until the judge rebuked the witnesses for their exuberance, and the sordid trial wore to its inevitable end.

The jury was absent for a few moments. They returned to their places with a verdict of "Guilty" against the three prisoners. Mrs. Hayes, asked if she had anything to show cause why sentence should not be passed, broke down, sobbed, and again protested that her guilt was small because she had struck no blow.

Sentence, however, was not passed immediately. An inhuman practice of the criminal administration in past centuries was the postponing of the sentence until some time had passed. The wretches were therefore left in a condition of suspense.

After a certain delay, they were again placed in the dock, and their fate was announced. Billings and Wood were to be hanged, Catherine Hayes was to suffer the ordeal of death by fire. She fell upon her knees, shrieked, begged that any punishment might be given her rather than this one. The gaolers smothered her cries, and she was dragged from the dock, half-fainting.

In the short interval that elapsed between sentence and execution she seems to have shown a certain courage and indifference. That she was a woman of enormous strength of character, like many immoral women, one cannot doubt. Once convinced of the inevitability of her fate, once certain that no emotional histrionics, no hysterical appeals, would avert the punishment, she made up her mind to go through with the

business with a certain stoic calm. From time to time she sent affectionate messages to the man Billings, saying how sorry she was that she had led him into the committal of the crime. To Wood she sent a similar expression of remorse. It would be interesting to know the nature of the feelings of the men towards the woman who had brought them to this pass. It is, however, possible that they were too much obsessed with fear to experience any other kind of emotion.

On the Friday night previous to the Monday fixed for the execution, Catherine made an attempt to poison herself, an attempt that was frustrated by a woman-prisoner who chanced to come into the cell at the moment when the murderess was putting the glass to her mouth. She was then placed under a strong guard.

On the last morning of her brief life (she was then 36) Catherine Hayes rose very early. At the service which invariably preceded the ceremonial on the scaffold, she took the Sacrament at the hands of the gaol-chaplain. Seated beside Billings she caressed him, and again expressed her sorrow for his position.

At twelve o'clock noon the three condemned people were taken to the place of execution. The men were driven in a cart, Catherine on a sledge. Billings and his companion, unlike the majority of the criminals of the time, made no speech before execution. They went up the ladder without hesitation, and presently two bodies swinging convulsively caused the crowd to burst into shouts of satisfaction.

For Catherine there remained the burning.

Rough hands bound the trembling wretch to an iron stake. She tried to speak, but a gag was thrust over her mouth to stop her speech and her cries. The faggots were then fired, a quantity of oil having been applied to them to feed the flames. The gag fell, and she shrieked in agony. The executioner, humane enough in his way, then attempted to get hold of a cord that had remained round her neck, in order that he might end her suffering by strangling. The flames bit into his hands, and he was forced to abandon his task. More faggots were then applied to the heap. In three or four hours the body of Catherine Hayes was converted into ashes.

She escaped, therefore, the indignity of hanging in chains, a frequent practice in those humane times! It was based upon the absurd and entirely erroneous theory that the sight of malefactors dangling from gibbets in public places would deter potential criminals from crime. In the result it had a diametrically opposite effect. The gibbet became a subject of coarse jests among the lower sections of the population, and the law was stripped of dignity and awe.

The bodies of Wood and Billings were carried a hundred yards and then exposed on these shameful posts to remain there until the flesh dropped from the bones, a rotting tribute to the wisdom and beneficence of our criminal system in the year 1726, and for many years after that time!

Looking back on this story of Catherine Hayes, one is impelled to ask a question that frequently arises in modern times when a case of the kind

is involved. A man kills his wife in order that he may marry another woman; a wife kills her husband in order that she may marry another man. The superficial questioner at once asks:

“Why was the victim destroyed? Why did not the husband, or the wife, merely go away with the new lover?”

Sometimes the financial factor is the predominant cause, but more often the explanation is founded on a highly intriguing phase of character—a phase exhibited to a larger extent in the middle and lower-middle classes than in the so-called higher sections of Society.

There are certain persons who dread what is termed a scandal more than any other thing. To elope would cause tongues to wag, the eloping persons would be social outcasts. Rather than risk this disgrace, men and women have done murder in cold blood. The philosopher and the logician may view this attitude with the amusement which it probably deserves, but humanity is composed, for the larger part, of people to whom philosophy and logic are unknown quantities.

In the case of Catherine Hayes, there was stupidity in the method of destruction in addition to an absence of logic. For had Catherine and her companions exercised a little thought they might easily have evaded detection. The purchase of a small quantity of such a substance as quicklime would have enabled them to reduce the body of their victim to a compass and a condition in which the remains could probably have been disposed of with perfect ease.

Fortunately for the ends of the law, however,

the person who commits murder is very rarely an individual of patient and scientific habits. He rushes at the first convenient weapon. A knife, a revolver, a bludgeon, he snatches whichever is nearest to his hand. The poisoner, as we know, frequently resorts to the use of arsenic, the most easily detected of all irritant substances. With a little care, a little research, he might light upon a poison more elusive, more difficult to locate and to identify.

Catherine Hayes and her lovers chose the easiest way. The murderer, more often than the thief, follows this course. That is why the thief in many cases escapes, the destroyer of a fellow creature only very rarely. The murderer, in his obsession to be rid of his victim, travels to his objective in a state of brain-mist. He sees only the end in view—he neglects the details. In his semi-blindness he makes a false move, and leaves behind him the trifle that in the last reckoning proves the link between the crime and the criminal.

ELIZABETH BROWNRIGG  
1720-1767





## ELIZABETH BROWNRIGG

1720-1767

IF Nero Claudius Cæsar could have been roused from his reverie in some circle of the Inferno and brought to Fleur-de-Lys Court, Fetter Lane, London, in the year 1765, he would have found a very sympathetic person in Mrs. Elizabeth Brownrigg. It is conceivable that Nero might have regarded her methods as crude, unimaginative; for mere flogging as a means of inflicting pain would perhaps have seemed, to one versed in subtle torments, a foolish and fatiguing business. But the spirit that informed Mrs. Brownrigg, if not her actual methods, would certainly have delighted the Imperial criminal. Had Elizabeth lived in the first century and presented herself at the Court, she would doubtless have found a choice appointment in the entourage of the Emperor.

For Nero and Mrs. Brownrigg, although far removed socially and in point of time, were in reality brother and sister in their devotion to cruelty for its own sake. This woman, a coarse but efficient midwife, always ready with quip and jest, always cheering her patients with some obscene stoicism, became, during the middle period of her life, a tormentor of children, and

finally achieved the distinction of being tried for the murder of one of these victims.

The life, the surroundings, the profession of this woman were entirely commonplace. There would be no excuse for relating the record of certain years of her career but for the fact that the record exhibits a case where the practice of systematic cruelty became a source of exquisite and unholy delight.

Elizabeth Brownrigg was born in 1720. Her family name was Hartley or Harkley. History is not precise on the point, nor is it material. As a child she appears to have been normal enough, devoted to dolls and games. Her temper was smooth and pleasant. She grew up amid the ordinary surroundings of working-class people, and at the age of fifteen became a servant at a house in Goodman's Fields, Whitechapel. Here she made the acquaintance of a young house-painter who happened to be working on an adjacent building. They were married soon afterwards and went to live at Greenwich, where they remained for five years.

At the end of that time the couple moved to a house situated in Fleur-de-Lys Court, Fetter Lane, Holborn. This court still remains—unknown, however, to few people with the exception of policemen, pressmen, compositors, and tourists exploring the backwoods of Holborn and Fleet Street.

Mrs. Brownrigg seems to have done her maternal duty to the nation, for in the space of fifteen years she gave birth to no less than fifteen children. Of these, however, only three survived. In view of the character of one of the

survivors at least, perhaps this wholesale extinction may not have been altogether a matter for regret!

The painting and decorating business languishing to some extent, and Mrs. Brownrigg having apparently modified her ambitions as a populator of her country, the woman decided to enjoy a vicarious dignity by ministering to potential mothers. She gained employment as a midwife and was soon prospering in her new profession. It is said that she invariably treated her patients with kindness and care. The chronicler adds, however, that the babes very rarely survived! One may perhaps hazard a guess that Nature was not altogether unassisted in these infantile collapses. A woman capable of flogging her apprentices for two hours on end would probably not hesitate to take the life of a child if the bribe were sufficiently tempting.

It was at this time when the work of bringing children into the world (and sometimes helping them out) was giving Mrs. Brownrigg a sufficiency of employment that she suddenly resolved to take into her house an apprentice to help her in the domestic work.

Now let it be noted that until this moment the woman had never experienced the pleasure of wielding authority. The coming of an apprentice over whom the law gave her a parental and almost absolute control probably stirred in her some latent impulse which until that time had not possessed scope wherein to develop.

In this connection it may be pointed out that if ever an Act of Parliament was designed to encourage unscrupulous men and women in acts

of cruelty and despotism, the Act dealing with masters and apprentices was perhaps the deed in question. For it gave the master a power that was virtually autocratic in its extent and its flexibility. A master might maintain his apprentice on the borderline of sheer starvation, send him to sleep on bare planks, and flog him mercilessly for the smallest fault; but, providing the unfortunate youth did not actually succumb, the law rarely took much heed. If, on exceptional occasions, a case of serious ill-treatment *did* come into the courts, authority, in the majority of instances, was on the side of the employer. Thus, an apprentice's sole safeguard was a kindly disposition on the part of his master. If luck favoured the youth, he had an excellent home. If luck was against him, his condition was probably far worse than that of a negro on a Kentucky plantation!

Mrs. Brownrigg showed considerable diplomacy when her first apprentice, Mary Mitchell, a workhouse orphan, was taken into her house. For the law required that there should be a probation period of one month before the actual articles were ratified. Elizabeth, well aware of this fact, and anxious to obtain the consent of the child to the articles, treated her with extraordinary kindness and consideration. Indeed, so cleverly did she play the part of the indulgent mistress that Mary without hesitation consented to be bound when the time arrived.

Now note what followed. Hardly had a day elapsed after the signing of the document when Brownrigg, revelling in the sense of a newly-gained power, entered the kitchen and in a

formidable voice ordered the wretched girl to strip off the clothes in which she stood and to dress herself in some hideous rags.

The initial acts of cruelty that ensued were subtle rather than brutal. The woman would demand a long day's work from the apprentice, promising her a hearty meal at the end of it. The meal was cooked, but hardly had the attractive smell tickled the girl's nostrils when the dish was snatched from her hand and she was ordered into a corner of the kitchen to dine off stale bread and the rinds of cheese. Mrs. Brownrigg would then fall upon the stew or pastry, devouring it with savage appetite, and watching with delighted eyes the agonized envy of the hungry apprentice!

On other occasions she would pull the girl's hair, call her a dirty slut, slap her face, and bestow kicks (sometimes indecent kicks) upon her person. She would joke coarsely as she performed these ceremonies, whilst her excellent husband who, in the beginning, took no active part in the persecution, would sit grinning at his wife's antics. His son, who still remained at home, would share the enjoyment.

It was evident that the trio had found a new and exhilarating diversion. Mrs. Brownrigg was able to vary the monotony of helping to bring children into the world by causing one wretched creature to wish herself out of it, whilst Brownrigg, *père* and son, weary of house-decorating, could view the decoration with stripes of the body of the unfortunate little apprentice.

At intervals Mrs. Brownrigg would fall upon the child and whip her mercilessly for some

real or imaginary lapse of duty. Some of the pretexts for these flagellations would have been humorous had they not been followed by the savage performance. For instance, on one occasion Mary was soundly thrashed because she had omitted to "say grace" before a meal of week-old crusts and cheese that was greening with age. The spectacle of Mrs. Brownrigg as a theological critic is illuminating when we remember how often religious fervour has been accompanied by the grossest cruelties. Torquemada, directing the tortures of his Inquisition, was perhaps not altogether unrelated to Elizabeth Brownrigg flogging her apprentice for omitting a perfunctory "grace".

There is no doubt that the woman derived great pleasure from the screams and moans of her child-victim. Her coarse face would flame with delight as she inflicted the punishments. A latent Sadistic tendency was probably asserting itself.

There came the day at length when the agonies of Mary Mitchell must have become monotonous, and thereupon Mrs. Brownrigg looked round for another apprentice to share in the flagellations. Very soon she secured an orphan from the Foundling Hospital—Mary Jones, aged fourteen. It is possible that the little girl, who was in all probability not treated too kindly at that institution (for discipline in those days was invariably harsh and sometimes cruel), looked forward to a certain freedom and indulgence when she entered the great world beyond the Foundling walls—the world symbolized by Fleur-de-Lys Court in Fetter Lane.

Disillusion came soon enough if such hopes really existed. For immediately after the ratifying of the articles of apprenticeship Mrs. Brownrigg read the girl a short lecture in which she warned her to expect no mercy if she showed the least sign of laziness or of insubordination. Mary was then taken to a cupboard under the stairs which was to be her bedroom. She was locked inside with some bread and water and left to her reflections.

On the following morning the child-torturer found her first pretext for experimenting on the new apprentice. Having set the child to scrub the floor, she swiftly pointed to a certain section that was not sufficiently cleansed. The girl was made to strip herself of every garment and was then placed across two chairs.

For half an hour she was thrashed, first with a heavy cane and afterwards with a strap. Brownrigg and his son coolly watched the exhibition, spurring on the woman to fresh vigour when she showed signs of flagging.

From that day there were frequent whippings of more or less severity, but at length the woman decided to vary these punishments with other and more subtle pains.

She discovered by a chance remark that the new apprentice, Mary Jones, had a horror of drowning, and would frequently wake in the night from a dream that she had fallen into the water. Instantly the ingenious Mrs. Brownrigg determined to play upon this fear. Coming up behind the girl when she was scrubbing the floor, the diabolical woman would seize her head and hold it in the water of the pail until suffocation



was at hand. Later, she went to the length of filling a bath with water, and repeating the process until Mary was unconscious.

The first apprentice soon sank into a condition of sullen resignation. The second, however, retained some kind of spirit and sought a means of escape from the hell into which she had strayed. For some weeks she was unsuccessful. There came at last a morning when the key of the street door, usually safely hidden under the pillow of the tormentor, was left in the lock. The girl fled from the house and sought the Foundling Hospital, where she told her story.

Now one would have imagined that when the tale of horror was made known to the authorities at that excellent institution an immediate prosecution of the Brownriggs would have followed as a matter of course. But, as we have suggested, mere cruelty was so commonplace an incident of those times that if the inflicter of it stopped short of actual murder, he frequently escaped punishment. It therefore happened that the Foundling Hospital governors merely demanded a species of monetary compensation and the cancelment of the indentures.

Mrs. Brownrigg, not at all discouraged by this experience, looked round for a third apprentice. She speedily found one in the workhouse at Whitefriars.

This time the potential victim was a child of somewhat feeble intellect of the name of Mary Clifford. Once again the farce of the probation period was gone through with due solemnity, and the new apprentice was bound to her mistress for the customary period. It was destined,

however, that on this occasion the articles were to be cancelled by an authority more peremptory and more far-reaching than the governors of the Foundling Hospital!

From the moment when the girl came into her house the woman conceived for her a certain dislike which she had not entertained for the other apprentices. The punishments inflicted on the latter were instigated by a Sadistic tendency. For Mary Clifford there was a personal hatred. The child was stupid, and doubtless irritating at times. Frequently she made blunders that involved the household in expense.

On this wretched creature Brownrigg now concentrated her fury. She was thrashed not merely every day but several times daily! Her sleeping place was the coal-hole; the bed was a mat that swarmed with vermin! A few filthy clothes were given her. She wore these day and night, removing them only when she was to receive her daily portion of stripes.

From the afternoon of Saturday to Monday the family would frequently absent themselves and spend the week-end at their cottage in Islington, in those days a place of considerable resort on the part of City dwellers. Throughout the entire period both girls were locked in the cellar without light or food, with the exception of a few crusts of bread, and deprived of a drop of water.

Father and son rarely took an active part in the flagellations, but they derived great amusement from the spectacle, and on occasions would relieve Mrs. Brownrigg when fatigue overcame that usually tireless person.

That the woman possessed a certain grim sense of humour would seem evident, for she sometimes impressed upon the apprentices that the whippings were performed for their benefit, so that when they encountered the hardships of the world outside Fetter Lane they might be more ready to endure those hardships. Perhaps she starved them on the same principle. We are reminded of Mr. Squeers, his mouth filled with cold roast beef, impressing upon his half-starved pupils the maxim "Conquer your appetites, boys, and you'll conquer 'uman natur'."

In addition to flogging and half-drowning the wretched Mary Clifford, Mrs. Brownrigg devised a method of inflicting upon her some of the preliminary sensations of strangulation. On one occasion when the child had broken open a cupboard door to procure some food, the door itself was used as a means of punishment. One end of a chain was fastened noose-like round the girl's neck, the other end was attached to the door. The door was then opened and shut with abrupt movements, and each time the noose tightened to the point of incipient strangulation.

At a later stage the woman would haul up the girls by their wrists to a waterpipe in the ceiling of the kitchen. Then, with their feet suspended a few inches from the floor and their muscles strained to the limits of endurance, they were flogged until they became unconscious or until the hands of Mrs. Brownrigg could no longer use the lash with any kind of conviction.

Later still, the woman was seized with a craving for the shedding of blood, and to this end she would sometimes slash the arms of the

apprentices with penknives, or other convenient articles of the kind. Once she tore open the mouth of Mary Clifford and clipped the tongue with a pair of scissors. This was to cure the girl of tale-bearing, she told her, and she added a threat that on the next occasion the tongue would be removed.

There were other torments, but the conventions of decency forbid their description. Enough, however, has been written to prove that Mrs. Brownrigg belonged to that small but sinister group of mortals to whom cruelty is an end in itself. They pursue it without any practical object, and reach a stage when life holds no stimulus, no solace, unless they are inflicting pain on some living thing, human or beast.

It may be wondered why the miserable little apprentices did not communicate with the world outside. They did not get the opportunity. Invariably they were kept under lock and key and guarded with rigidity. The patients whom from time to time Elizabeth Brownrigg received into her house for the purposes of her profession of midwife did not stir from their rooms. When the cries of the two children reached them and they inquired what was happening, the ingenious woman was ever ready with a specious explanation. Thus, when one patient was roused from sleep by screams that probably suggested the progress of a murder, Elizabeth promptly explained that Mary Clifford had developed an insane horror of beetles and that her hysterical cries had been called forth by one of those creatures.

It is possible, no doubt, that the patients did not always entirely believe these fictions, but perhaps they were too much engaged with their own sufferings, or their newly-found happiness in the possession of babes, to bother to any extent concerning the obscure persons in the lower parts of the house.

And so it happened that all went smoothly with this tormentor of children until a certain morning when the stepmother of Mary Clifford called at the house in Fleur-de-Lys Court to inquire about the girl's welfare. Mrs Brownrigg received the visitor with her usual coolness and audacity. She met the inquiry with a flat denial of the girl's presence in the house. "There was no such person," as Mrs. Betsy Prig (another member of her profession) would have remarked. . . . Soon after that Mrs. Clifford was going away, and the door had been peremptorily banged.

However, a neighbour who had overheard the conversation on the doorstep followed Mrs. Clifford and proceeded to give her certain information. She said she felt positive that the child was in the house and that both apprentices were cruelly ill-treated. Screams and cries for mercy had often penetrated the walls, she added. Finally, the woman promised that she would make investigations and communicate to Mrs Clifford the result.

Now this visit, although apparently it ended quite harmlessly for her, seems to have brought to a head all the demoniacal fury in the composition of Brownrigg. Having been caused a certain uneasiness by the stepmother, she reflected

that the child must pay the price. She prepared for a flogging on the grand scale—something unequalled, something which should stand out from the preceding performances.

Mary Clifford was wrenched from the cellar and ordered to remove her ragged garments. She was then tied up to the pipe in the ceiling and thrashed till the blood streamed down upon the floor. This hideous punishment was inflicted no less than three times during that same day. It endured, in all, three or four hours. At length, Mary, unconscious, was dragged from the place of martyrdom and taken to a sort of outhouse.

This was the last performance of Mrs. Brownrigg on the bodies of her apprentices. Suspicion was at last aroused. Two days afterwards a servant of Mrs. Deacon (the neighbour in the adjoining building) whilst engaged in spying on the house through an opening in a skylight that overlooked the shed, saw something that seemed to her a bundle of red-stained rags stretched on the floor. Presently the red bundle moved and moaned. A little later the servant was able to make out the form of a woman or child.

From that moment matters moved swiftly. Mrs. Clifford, the stepmother, was immediately fetched. She communicated with the Overseers of the parish, whose officers at once proceeded to Fleur-de-Lys Court.

In the meantime Elizabeth had somehow contrived to ascertain what was in progress. Resourceful as usual, she calmly arranged with her husband to hide the body of the half-dying girl apprentice, whilst she herself, having hastily assumed a rough disguise, fled from the house.

She was followed a few hours later by her son, who brought food and clothing.

When the officers entered the house Mr. Brownrigg, emulating the methods of his wife, lied with great effrontery. Assuming a tone of indignation, he swore that the stories were inventions on the part of evil-minded neighbours, and he added that the girl, Mary Clifford, had left the house long since. He had no knowledge of her whereabouts. He threatened the officers with the law of trespass if they dared enter the building.

However, the officials, probably good judges of character, saw through the bluff. Handcuffs were produced, and the officer in charge hinted that unless the girl were given up to them immediately Brownrigg would be arrested on the charge of having made away with her. This threat produced the effect required. The scoundrel immediately collapsed, begged for mercy, and conducted the search-party to the coal-cellar, where the girl now lay. The handcuffs then came into use, and he was taken away. A warrant was issued the same day for the apprehension of his wife and son.

The condition of the two girls when they were examined at the infirmary was appalling. The surgeons, well used to shocking sights, were sickened, and more than one nurse fainted with horror when the hideous wounds were displayed.

The man Brownrigg was brought up at the Guildhall, and after some formalities was committed to take his trial at the Old Bailey. In the meantime, Mary Mitchell was slowly recovering from her injuries. Her fellow-sufferer, Mary

Clifford, died within four days of her admission to the infirmary.

During this time Elizabeth and her son were living in poor lodgings in the City, at no great distance from Fetter Lane. Entirely without money save the few coins they had brought from the house, they had to exist on bread and water.

Presently the pair decided that they would be safer if they moved to some distance from Town. Again disguised, they crept out at night and walked to Wandsworth, where they secured a mean lodging over the shop of a chandler.

The authorities were now advertising for the fugitives, and in several newspapers there appeared announcements calling upon citizens to help in her arrest. In these advertisements the woman was described as a "person smooth in speech, her dress a black silk crape or bombazine gown, a black silk petticoat, and a purple petticoat, flowered. . . ." For many years afterwards this costume was used by caricaturists for their presentiments of monstrous old women.

The residence at Wandsworth did not last more than four or five days. For the chandler was a man who read newspapers. Moreover, from the beginning he had regarded his lodgers with a certain suspicion; nor had the assurance of Elizabeth that she was a "widow from the country" impressed him to any extent. He volunteered information to the authorities after reading the announcement. Within a few hours mother and son had exchanged their Wandsworth quarters for cells in the prison of the Poultry.

On the following morning the two criminals



were taken to the Mansion House and, after a short hearing, were formally committed for trial on the coroner's warrant.

At this point Elizabeth was seized with illness, real or imaginary. She was judged unfit to be moved, and several days passed before she was taken under a strong guard to Newgate, her son having preceded her to the gaol immediately after the Mansion House hearing. The crowd made many attempts to seize her en route, and called down curses on her head. A British mob is rarely emotional except where cruelty is concerned. Then it atones for any want of emotion on other occasions.

The last act but one of this sordid drama was staged on September 14th, 1767, when the three nauseous criminals stood in the dock of the Old Bailey to answer the indictment: "For that being moved by the instigation of the devil, they did so assault one Mary Clifford that she did pine and languish till she died".

The trial lasted eleven hours. The principal witness was, of course, the wretched Mary Mitchell, the first of the apprentices, the girl who had first roused the Sadistic horror in the heart of the woman. Although Mary was still in a state of great weakness, she was able to give her evidence, and she did this with precision and with conviction.

There was no defence!

For some occult reason best known to the jury, the father and son were acquitted. Perhaps the jurymen held that the men were entirely dominated by the woman; and there was no actual evidence, of course, that they had taken

part in the actual crime which brought about the death of Clifford, though one would imagine that they were guilty accessories. They escaped for the time, but were brought up for trial on a minor charge at a later date and sentenced to small penalties.

For Mrs. Brownrigg, however, there could be only one issue of that trial. After a brief consideration she was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged on the following day.

To the end of her road this woman had now travelled. One day remained to her of life. She appears to have spent the hours in a state of humble repentance. She listened with great attention to the words of the chaplain, and several times confessed that she was sorry for what she had done. Unfortunately, these late repentances, though perhaps grateful to a professional priest, are not very convincing to the cynical layman.

It is said that the crowd which gathered next day to see the last journey of Mrs. Brownrigg was the largest that had ever assembled at an English execution. Political malefactors, thieves, forgers, assassins, all had contributed to the "shows" at Tyburn Theatre Royal, but it was given to a wretched midwife who had flogged to death an apprentice to "draw" the biggest audience.

The crowd behaved very badly, we are told. The hoots, the imprecations, the jeers were appalling. Even the soldiers, accustomed to barrack-room language, were said to have been horrified by the curses of the enraged Londoners. The chaplain who accompanied the condemned woman in the cart was appealed to by countless

grimy ruffians (themselves perhaps destined some day to play their parts at Tyburn), who begged him to pray for the damnation of the woman rather than for her salvation.

To the end Mrs. Brownrigg showed great coolness. She mounted the ladder without assistance, and in order to appease the crowd to some extent, the woman admitted her guilt and the justice of the sentence. The rope was placed round her neck in the leisurely fashion of those days, the cart was jerked away, and human justice had said its last word to Elizabeth Brownrigg!

So ends her story. But a mere record of crimes of cruelty is not sufficient—we must ask ourselves what constrained her to those ends.

It is fairly conceivable that the sudden possession of power, even power so commonplace as the authority of a mistress over an apprentice, arriving at a period in her life when the ordinary impulses of sex were not sufficiently indulged, may have urged a latent Sadistic craving to come to the surface.

This is an exceedingly disagreeable subject, but if we are to make any attempt to realize the motives of such women as Brownrigg and her companions in crimes of cruelty, we must certainly reckon with this tendency. The inflicting of physical pain on creatures powerless to resist affords an exquisite, if horrible, pleasure to certain persons. To suggest that this woman was merely a fierce uncontrolled virago, who beat her slaves because she was irritated by their clumsiness or laziness, would be an entirely false conclusion.

The notorious Marquis de Sade, from whom the vice of Sadism derives its name, frequently declared that he derived more satisfaction from the writhings of his victims than from any other practice.

This vice extends to wider regions than the regions of classified crime. The monastic life sometimes tends to its development. Nature is a queer taskmaster. She imposes certain obligations on the senses of men and women; if those obligations are unfulfilled, she has an unpleasant habit of twisting them round.

The physical appearance of Mrs. Brownrigg would have satisfied Lombroso, for it presents many features of the criminal type. We see the coarse aquiline nose, the low forehead, the aggressive and heavy chin, the protuberant ears. In her younger days she was called handsome, but as the years passed her face fattened and became sensual and flabby. The lips are thin, not unlike the lips of Torquemada.

The woman Brownrigg does not stand alone. Beside her in a sinister group there stand school-masters, *souteneurs*, religious persecutors of the Torquemada type: High or low, scholars or unschooled, they are all of them sealed of the order of Elizabeth Brownrigg!



WILLIAM BURKE AND  
WILLIAM HARE

Burke 1792-1829      Hare 1790-?



## WILLIAM BURKE AND WILLIAM HARE

BURKE 1792-1829      HARE 1790-?

TO people living in this twentieth century, when medical science has no difficulty in securing subjects for dissection, the rise and fall of what was called "The Resurrectionist Movement" will probably be of interest. This movement tended to flourish in Scotland more vigorously than in other parts of Great Britain, because the Scottish reverence for the dead held back the majority of persons from selling the bodies of their relatives and friends in legitimate fashion. The doctors and their students, at a loss for subjects on which to pursue their anatomical inquiries, were compelled to fall back upon men who rifled graveyards.

The extraordinary case of William Burke and William Hare, who committed a series of diabolical crimes in the Westport district of Edinburgh, is notable for many things, but principally perhaps for the fact that it was by reason of the outcry raised by their mass-murders that Parliament proceeded to pass an Act which enabled the medical profession to pursue its investigations with less difficulty but with more decency.



Although the stealing of bodies for dissection became a recognized trade merely one hundred years ago, the casual practice of "body-snatching" goes back as far as the latter half of the seventeenth century. The practice continued unbroken, growing in volume until 1832, when the Act to which reference has been made passed into the Statute Book.

To Edinburgh there belongs the ghastly distinction of having been the chief centre of the "industry", because its University attracted students from all parts of the country.

The principal participants in the trade of body-snatching were, of course, sextons and grave-diggers. But there were, in addition, plenty of idlers and vagabonds, anxious and willing to earn a few pounds by ghoulish tricks.

In "A Tale of Two Cities", Dickens has presented a typical Cockney "resurrectionist"—"Jerry Cruncher"—a humorous rogue who revelled in his work. It is an amazing and horrifying truth that the men who took part in these ghastly expeditions frequently loved the task for its own sake, quite apart from any money reward. It is possible that there was something in the darkness and eeriness of the work that got hold of their drink-sodden imaginations. There was never any difficulty in finding "resurrection-men". Indeed, the supply often exceeded the demand.

Out of the long catalogue of body-snatchers, there stand forth William Burke and William Hare. Burke, the son of a labourer, was born in Tyrone in 1792. After working in several capacities in Ireland, he came in 1818 to



WILLIAM BURKE



Edinburgh, where he secured occupation on the Union Canal construction works. At the same time he met in a tavern a woman, Helen McDougal. Very soon they were living together "without benefit of clergy", and were drinking steadily. From first to last liquor held the high place in Burke's life.

He was a feeble character, lovable perhaps in his rough way, and entirely the sort of man who might have ended his days peacefully and respectably but for the intervention of the stronger criminal, Hare. There came a day when Burke and his companion moved to a lodging-house in Tanner's Close, Edinburgh. The house was kept by William Hare. That was how the partnership had its beginning. Hare, also a native of Ireland, was working on the Union Canal. This fact, combined with the house intimacy, tended to bring the two men together.

Soon after Burke's arrival at the lodging-house, an old pensioner who stayed there happened to die suddenly, leaving his rent unpaid. Hare, resentful of this loss of money, suddenly hit upon the notion of recouping himself by selling the body to the students of Dr. Robert Knox at the Medical School in Surgeons' Square.

No difficulty attended this first and comparatively innocent transaction. At night the body of the pensioner was carried in a box to the place. A sum of £10 was promptly paid for it. Thus encouraged, Burke and his friend became regular providers of subjects for Knox and his students. They prowled around churchyards,

but were not always successful. The sextons resented this interference with their trade, and on several occasions the two men went home with bloody heads.

These failures discouraged them, and they began to drink heavily. In order to gain money for liquor Burke began to patch shoes, but his customers were rare. Hare, growing sick of his work at the Canal, suggested to Burke that they should abandon the slow and perilous business of churchyard body-snatching for more direct and simpler methods. (At a later stage, when the men were on their trial, Hare swore that Burke was the original tempter, but all the evidence in connection with the characters and temperaments of the two criminals points in the opposite direction.)

Having decided that murder was the easiest way, they discussed ways and means. Helen McDougal and Mrs. Hare undoubtedly took part in these conferences, but abstained from any active collaboration in the crimes that followed. They held the theory that if eventually the truth was disclosed, the fact that they were only academically concerned would bring about their acquittal.

Picture the place in which this foreshadowing of mass-murder developed into reality. A filthy lodging-house, doorless, airless, with rotting stairways and dust-grimed windows. An ideal house for murder, because here were always drunken lodgers, yells, cries, screams. The scuffle of crime, the moans of victims, would mingle with the common noises and rouse no comment from the passers-by.

Hare, the bolder criminal, began to prowl the streets of Westport day and night in order to find some likely victim. The men had decided that for their first experiment in murder they would select an old and feeble woman. Their search proved fruitless until early in the spring of 1828.

One afternoon, whilst pacing the Grass-market, Hare met an old woman, Abigail Simpson. She had come to Edinburgh to draw a small pension, and had obviously been converting some of the proceeds into drink. It seemed to Hare that here was the very person designed for the initial crime. She was aged, she was weak. Moreover, she was in a state that rendered her ready to accept an invitation to go anywhere and to trust any friendly voice.

The man played his part well. He began by pretending that she was an old acquaintance. The woman in her bemused condition was easily persuaded to accept further drinks, and later she went with Hare to his house to continue the debauch.

Burke was in waiting. Instantly he joined his accomplice in preparations for a merry night. One cannot help imagining that the drinking bouts which invariably preceded the crimes formed one of the principal attractions for all concerned.

Towards dawn the wretched woman became quite helpless. They carried her to a bed and left her for a time. The two men then sat and debated how she should be dispatched. Eventually, they decided that suffocation would be the easiest method. There would be no noise,

neither would there be many marks of the means by which the victim had died

The whisky urged them on. Sober, they might have hesitated concerning that first crime, but the orgy of the night had prepared them for devilry. They went to the room where the woman lay unconscious. Hare placed his hand over nose and mouth to stop the breathing. Burke laid himself across her chest. There was no resistance. The woman died without uttering a sound. It is probable that the ease and smoothness of that initial murder paved the way for the crimes that followed.

Immediately afterwards they removed the clothes, and then notified Paterson, the porter at the Medical School, that another "subject" was ready for the students. Late at night the body of Abigail Simpson was taken in a packing-case to Surgeons' Square. Dr. Knox himself received the men, and expressed approval of the body. £10 was paid to Burke and Hare for their first experiment in killing.

Within a few days they committed their second crime on the person of a man named Joseph, a lodger in Hare's house. The man had caught a fever. Hare, fearful lest the fact might drive away his tenants, consulted with Burke, and they decided that they might achieve the double purpose of relieving the place of infection and enriching their pockets by offering the man as a subject to Surgeons' Square. On this occasion the suffocation was carried out by means of a pillow. Within a week another lodger, a match-seller from England, followed Joseph to the Medical School.

All was going smoothly for the men, but presently it occurred to them that they must not rely too much on victims in the house. Suspicion might be roused if lodger after lodger vanished. They resolved to use the streets.

The streets soon proved responsive. Strolling through the Canongate, Burke met a young woman, a *fille de joie*, Mary Paterson, who in company with a girl named Janet Brown was going from tavern to tavern. Burke, who was by this time something of a connoisseur in "subjects", perceived at once that the fine physique of the young Cyprian would render her a very remunerative bargain.

The first move, according to custom, was to induce intoxication. Very soon both young women were in a semi-maudlin state and were ready to agree to any proposal. Burke insisted on their accompanying him to the house of his brother Constantine who lived near to the Canongate. Arrived there, the party was welcomed by Mrs. Constantine Burke who probably, but not certainly, guessed the motive of the visit. Indeed, throughout the proceedings it was a matter of doubt whether Burke's brother and the latter's wife had actual knowledge of the crimes. They were never implicated.

It was a comparatively early hour of the morning. Mrs. Burke prepared breakfast; there was much eating and more drinking. Burke presently left the house and went to find his accomplice, who returned with him immediately. On the way, the precious pair planned the details of the killing of Mary Paterson.

In the meantime, Mary's companion, Janet



Brown, had gone out. When she returned several hours later the murder had been done. Burke was ready with explanations. He told the girl that her friend had taken offence at a chance remark and had left the house in haste. The scoundrels then tried to prevail upon Janet to remain, hoping that they might get her into a state of intoxication which would render her an easy victim. She refused; and probably owed her life to the refusal.

Things then moved swiftly. Within four hours of her death the body of the *fille de joie* was on Knox's dissecting-table. Burke and his friend showed a certain rashness in this murder, for they must have known that a girl of the character of Mary Paterson would be known to many people—and especially to certain students who might have enjoyed her company. Indeed, one of these youths, Ferguson (who in later years won celebrity in his profession), was horrified to recognize in the remains of Mary Paterson the woman with whom he had drunk and dallied only a few evenings before. However, if this student formed any suspicion regarding the manner of her death he kept it to himself, and accepted Burke's statement that he had obtained the body from an old woman in the Canongate who was a relative of the dead girl.

Four crimes had by this time been committed. There were more to come, but in this record it is impossible to place them in their chronological order. It is true that Burke in a confession revealed a number of crimes, and attempted to give dates, but the result was a mere jumble, contradictory and unconvincing.

Burke and his friend concentrated on the dregs of the city when hunting for victims. They had excellent reasons for this choice. Had respectable citizens vanished, there would have been swift and disconcerting inquiries. The wastrels cajoled to Tanner's Close were tramps, cindermen, beggars, persons without friends or relatives or homes. Their disappearance caused as little commotion as a pebble dropped into the sea.

During the first part of their campaign of murder the two men occasionally did honest work—Hare on the Canal and Burke as a cobbler. It is possible that this industry was actuated by a desire to keep on good terms with the police. The scheme certainly proved successful. Both men were regarded as honest, hardworking folk, none the worse because occasionally they were fuddled.

There came the time, however, when even intermittent work galled them. Their trade—easy, interesting—was now obsessing them. They had reached the point when the act of murder fascinated them. The entire business exactly suited their temperaments. There was the excitement of the initial hunt; the irresponsible joy of the debauch which preceded the crime; and then the hot climax of the actual killing. For these men, murder took the place of sport, gambling, and love.

How they must have laughed as they sat over their fire at night with their women beside them and contrasted the easy money of their way of life with the toil of the former time, its dullness, its laborious monotony. How the voices must have grown shrill with anticipation

as they thought about the morrow and its chances.

The killing of Mary Paterson was followed by a double crime that included mother and daughter. Mary Haldane, a middle-aged woman of the town, was invited to Hare's house and dispatched in the usual way. Her daughter, Peggy, wandering the streets in the attempt to find her mother, was told by a tradesman that the latter had been seen going to Hare's lodging-house. Peggy went there, was received by Hare, who promised to help her in the search. The usual drinks followed, the girl sitting on the very chair where a few days previously her mother had sat whilst preparations were being made for her death.

Burke came in. The signal passed between them. By this time the girl was well on the road to intoxication. Half an hour later she had followed her mother on her journey.

When, at a later time, the crimes of these ruffians were exposed, the crime that undoubtedly excited the greatest horror was the murder of a half-witted boy, James Wilson, sometimes called "Daft Jamie". Like many of his kind, he owned a sort of rough wit that rendered him a favourite. The students of Surgeons' Square knew the lad intimately; gave him money; encouraged him to exhibit his humour.

The killing of this youth was a tactical error on the part of Burke and Hare. Had they followed their original purpose, had they confined their deeds to obscure tramps and beggars, all might have been well with them. James Wilson, however, was too well known in Westport. Had the

scoundrels paused to consider the situation, they must have perceived that his evanishment would be immediately noted and investigated.

There is no necessity to linger over the details of this murder. It was made notable, however, by the fact that for the first time the men met fierce resistance. Although the boy had been given drink, he was far from being helpless. He struggled furiously, and the business of killing him occupied several minutes.

The second blunder in connection with this case was made by Burke when he handed the garments taken from the dead boy to his brother's son; for soon afterwards a man who had presented the clothes to "Jamie" happened to recognize them on the person of Constantine Burke's boy. Immediately he mentioned his discovery to the police. Strangely enough, they took small notice of the incident, but at a later stage it proved a tragic happening for Burke and his accomplice.

The end was now approaching. So smoothly had the partners carried on their trade that they were now actually contemplating the extension of their operations beyond the Westport district. Moreover, they had entered into a formal contract with Dr. Knox, under the terms of which they were to receive £10 per body in the winter and £8 in the summer.

The final murder committed by these strange ruffians was on the person of Mary Docherty. Roaming the streets, looking for her son who had wandered from her house, the woman fell in with Burke. After the usual drinking, she accompanied him to his home. She was greeted by the woman McDougal, who gave her breakfast, and suggested

that she should spend the night at the house whilst Burke made inquiries concerning her son.

Docherty consented to this suggestion, and was about to go to bed when Burke suddenly recalled the awkward fact that two lodgers, a soldier named Gray, and his wife, were occupying the room. Inventing the first pretext that came to him, he told the Grays that the woman was his cousin and that he was forced to offer her temporary lodging. He suggested that they should find a room for that one night at a tavern in the district and return in the morning for breakfast. To this suggestion the Grays agreed.

During the night Mary Docherty was suffocated after a prelude of drinking and horseplay. On this occasion Burke and Hare drank, sang, and recited verses of their own composition. In the morning, still under the influence of liquor, they stripped the dead woman and placed the body under some straw in a corner of the living-room. The act savoured of insanity in its rashness, but it is possible that their long immunity from detection had made these men utterly bare of caution.

Burke went to the tavern to fetch his lodgers for breakfast. Soon after the meal a child of Mrs. Gray, playing on the floor, came to the corner where the dead woman lay. Burke immediately snatched the child away. This action and the oath that went with it caused the mother to become suspicious. Later, when she was alone in the room, she went to the place and thrust aside the straw. . . .

The remainder of the story is commonplace enough, but it must be told in some detail, because it concerns the last act in the Westport

crimes. Mrs. Gray, on the point of fainting with horror, rushed into the adjoining room and told her husband of the discovery. They resolved to leave the house at once. On the stairway they met Helen McDougal. Perceiving that something unusual had happened, she questioned the Grays, who after some hesitation disclosed their reason for leaving the house. McDougal then said that the woman had died of alcoholic poisoning, but later she admitted the murder and tried to compromise matters by inviting the Grays to become partners in the horrible trade. The invitation was, of course, refused, and Gray with his wife went at once to the police in order to lay information.

Burke and Hare, returning from a drinking-bout, ignorant of that meeting on the stairs, packed the body of the woman in a tea-chest, and after dusk conveyed it to Surgeons' Square. They received the usual payment; and that was their last transaction with Dr. Robert Knox.

Meantime, Gray had told his story. Although the police authorities were by no means convinced of its truth and were inclined to attribute it to some personal spite, they decided to arrest immediately the four people whom Gray had named. Burke and his mistress submitted to the arrest without a murmur. It is clear that Burke was something of a fatalist. He probably told himself that he had come to the end of his road.

Next day, the man Gray was taken by the police to Knox's house. There, in a cellar, they found the body of the latest victim, Mary Docherty. Gray at once identified the corpse,

and swore that he had seen the woman forty-eight hours previously, alive and well, in Burke's house. Guided by this evidence, the police then arrested Hare and his wife.

Things now moved swiftly. Two well-known anatomists, Drs. Black and Christon, after examining the corpse, were satisfied that the woman had met her death by suffocation. Burke, questioned, invented an absurd story. He said that a man who had called upon him for the purpose of having shoes repaired had begged to be allowed to leave a box at the house for a few days. He had no knowledge that the box contained a dead woman. Helen McDougal, questioned apart, told a different story—equally ridiculous. There is no doubt that Burke, although a cunning murderer, was a very poor liar.

On December 8th, 1828, a citation was served upon the four prisoners, charging them to appear at the High Court of Justiciary on Wednesday, December 24th, at ten in the forenoon, "to underlie the law for the crimes of murdering Mary Paterson, James Wilson, and Mary Docherty". The prosecution had decided to proceed on these three indictments and to ignore the other crimes, of which there was presumptive evidence, but none that was sufficiently convincing to present to a jury.

Almost immediately it became known that Hare had decided to make an attempt to save his life by giving evidence against his friend. The honour among thieves of which we read in fiction is rarely a fact. The criminal is invariably an egotist run mad; egotism of that sort does not possess many scruples.

So intense was the horror aroused by the crimes, so violent was the rage of the people, that on the day previous to the trial the police of Edinburgh were reinforced by three hundred men. It was feared that the court-house would be stormed and the murderers taken out and hanged or burned alive.

Four judges sat on the bench during the trial, which opened on December 24th. There is no necessity to linger over the proceedings. They were uneventful enough, and the issue was never in doubt for a moment.

Hare was, of course, the chief witness for the Crown. He described in detail the murder of the woman Docherty, but denied having taken part in the crime. He swore that this was the only murder of which he had knowledge. Why he showed this reserve one cannot decide. Perhaps, however, he believed that the single admission would serve to secure his freedom, and that it would be well not to admit too much guilty knowledge.

The counsel engaged in the case on both sides were undistinguished, and although their names have been recorded, they would convey nothing to modern readers. Burke and Hare were defended respectively by the Dean of the Faculty and Mr. Henry Cockburn. Each counsel tried to show that his client was under the influence of his companion. The speeches, however, were half-hearted. The pleaders knew they were pleading a hopeless cause.

The trial which began at 10 a.m. on the day before Christmas ran its course through the night and ended on Christmas Day. At 8.30 on that



morning the jury went out to consider their verdict.

They were absent only fifty minutes. They found Burke guilty on all counts. The case against the woman McDougal was held to be "Not Proven". This ambiguous verdict is confined to Scottish Criminal Courts—in our own courts it is unknown.

The instant the verdict was announced Burke smiled, and turning to the woman beside him patted her on the shoulder and said in a loud voice: "Well, Nellie, *you* are out of the scare, anyway!" He then turned his face coolly towards the Lord Justice Clerk, who pronounced sentence in a very long-winded speech. McDougal was dismissed in a short homily wherein she was begged to change her way of life. The solemnity of the proceedings was relieved somewhat by the cracking of nuts among the spectators, whilst two of the judges slept peacefully throughout the Lord Justice's wearisome speeches.

On hearing the sentence, the people in the court clapped their hands and shouted for joy. Outside the building the cheering was so tremendous that it could be heard on Calton Hill. Rarely had the unemotional Scots showed so much excitement at a criminal trial.

For many weeks afterwards the Scottish Press was filled with stories of Burke and Hare. Editors blasted them in heavily-leaded type; amateur poets relieved their feelings in verse as appalling as the murders themselves. The following specimens will afford some notion of the quality of the poets!

"O Burke, cruel man, how detested thy name is,  
Thy dark deeds of blood are a stain on our times.  
O savage, relentless, for ever infamous,  
*Long, long will the world remember thy crimes!*"

"Let the guilt and the gloom speak nothing but terror,  
Some dark deeds of blood to the stranger proclaim,  
And ages to come ever mark them with horror,  
For the ghosts of the murdered will still gather there."

"O Hare, go and cover thy fugitive head  
In a land where you're lost to living and dead,  
For the living against thee will justly combine,  
And the dead will despise such a body as thine!"

Burke was at least spared the ordeal of reading the verses. In Calton Hill Prison, where he spent the days that elapsed between trial and execution, he behaved peaceably enough, and frequently spoke of his remorse. Moreover, he drew up and signed a confession in which he admitted having killed (in conjunction with Hare) sixteen people. He gave the names, the approximate dates, and further details. It has already been hinted, however, that the confession probably underrated the number of crimes.

On January 28th, 1829, Burke was roused at 5 o'clock and told that he was to die at half-past six. His irons were then struck off, and he said to the gaoler: "So may all my earthly chains fall from me." After that he knelt down with the chaplain and prayed for some time.

An enormous crowd, numbering more than 25,000 persons, had gathered outside the market, where the gallows was erected. Prices varying from 5s. to £1 were paid for seats in

windows. One fortunate speculator netted more than £200. The crowd passed the night eating, drinking, gambling, singing, and, as it was a Scottish crowd, praying.

Burke left the prison leaning on the chaplain's arm. There was some distance to walk to the Grassmarket, and the route was strewn with the curses of the people. The foulest epithets were thrown at Burke. Women shrieked blasphemies, and spat at him. "Burke him! Burke him!" was cried by somebody, and immediately the people fastened on the words, and it became a sort of rallying cry.

He was hurried to the scaffold. As the white cap was thrust over his head he began to recite the Creed, but before a dozen words had been uttered he was swinging from the rope. The wretched man did not die for nearly ten minutes. It was, of course, slow strangulation. (The merciful long-drop did not reach Britain till close upon forty years later.) Each time that the dangling body twitched the crowd uttered yells of delight. They were having a rare feast for their money!

Meantime, Hare had remained in prison whilst learned authorities argued concerning his fate. At the trial no verdict as to his guilt or innocence had been given, it being understood that in the case of an informer other procedure must be followed. Eventually it was decided that he should be set free.

On the night of February 5th, 1829, he was taken from his cell, carefully muffled and disguised. A seat in the coach for England had been booked for him, and under the name of "Mr.

Black" he travelled to that country with the ordinary passengers. From that night there is no authentic information regarding his history. There is a rumour, however, that in after years a blind man used to stand at a certain corner of Oxford Street asking for alms. Each night a woman would come for him and take him home. Neither of them was known to smile. It is believed that this pair of lonely ones was William Hare and his wife.

It is probable that the rumour held some truth. It is certain that Mrs. Hare did go to England, and that Helen McDougal went there soon after the execution of Burke. Both women travelled secretly and silently to avoid the fury which would otherwise have fallen on them, for the mass of people held them to be as guilty as the men.

Dr. Robert Knox was now called upon to face the consequences of his indifference and his carelessness. Following the habits of other doctors he had accepted the bodies brought to him with the most casual of inquiries. In the case of the "subjects" supplied by Burke and Hare, a most superficial examination would surely have revealed the fact that the men and women had met their deaths by suffocation. If Knox and his associates realized this possibility, they held their tongues concerning it.

That was the view which the mass of people proceeded to take. Knox's house was attacked, he himself narrowly escaped being lynched. His effigy was burned in the streets. The Press was virulent. Whilst several "die-hard" journals, anxious to defend medical traditions and medical

honour, stood by the anatomist, the majority of the newspapers set their most vituperative scribes to work.

Knox was an unusual type of man. Cold, aloof, contemptuous of opinion, he remained silent for some time, enduring the written onslaughts with the indifference with which he had endured the coarser attacks of the mob. Eventually, however, he was persuaded by his friends to make some kind of official remonstrance. Moreover, a committee of ten important persons, with the Marquis of Queensberry as their chairman, sat to deliberate the case. The report acquitted Knox of all responsibility, but suggested that he had been guilty of a certain laxity in accepting the bodies brought him by the murderers without submitting the latter to keen examination.

The report served its purpose. Almost immediately the outcry in the Press and in the mouths of the people died, and Knox was allowed to continue his work undisturbed. Looking back on the record after the lapse of a hundred years, the historian must incline to the view that Knox was certainly more guilty than the report implied. However, he was not alone in his guilt. The anatomists of those times, consumed with enthusiasm, rarely concerned themselves to any serious extent with the methods employed for the procuring of "subjects".

Three years after the execution of Burke, Parliament passed the Act to which a reference has been made. It was called the "Anatomy Act". It placed upon a legal basis the purchase of bodies from relatives at reasonable rates. The



WILLIAM HARE



body-snatching "industry" at once began to decay, though it lingered in certain places. The end of the "resurrectionist" movement, however, as an extensive and consistent practice, had certainly arrived.

Partnerships in crime are always intriguing and illuminating. There is nearly always one partner of the strong type and another of the weak order. One has only to study the faces of Burke and Hare to perceive immediately that Hare, with his terrible chin and his hard eyes, dominated the weak-chinned and mild-eyed Burke. One imagines that had these two men not met, Burke might have gone his way, harmlessly enough, and have finished in a drunkard's grave without having killed anything more important than a fly. He had his kinder moments; indeed, the very act which helped to reveal his guilt—the giving of certain garments to his brother's child—was an act of kindly feeling. He was faithful to the woman who shared his life. There is no record of his seeking other loves.

Hare was the criminal of all time. The supreme egotist, the pitiless brute, he took the course of least resistance and killed because killing was the easiest way of satisfying his desires. It is said that there were occasions when Burke hesitated, would gladly have spared a potential victim, but the stronger influence prevailed and the thing was done.

There is a certain irony in the fate of these two men. Hare, the baser scoundrel, escaped the scaffold, and escaped, too, the obloquy of adding a word to the English language—a word that



survives to this day. One wonders how many persons who use the word "burk" to convey the idea of covering-up or stifling an inquiry, are aware of the fact that it derives its origin from the name of the man who was hanged one hundred years ago in the Grassmarket of Edinburgh Town!

CHARLES PEACE

1832-1879



## CHARLES PEACE

1832-1879

IF an apology be needed for introducing this sordid thief, burglar, and murderer into a volume that deals with a Nero, a Brinvilliers, and a Rasputin, it must be found in the fact that Charles Peace represents to the very large number of his countrymen a tradition. The coolness of his character, the amazing brilliance of his exploits, is remembered while the more vulgar things are forgotten.

Peace represents the type of the professional criminal—the man who follows the calling of crime as methodically as the bank-clerk adds up his ledgers. It is true that he loved his work better than the bank-clerk loves his arithmetic, but one imagines that he would have performed it quite as conscientiously had he viewed it with the dislike which the majority of mankind entertain for the toil that brings them their food, drink, and shelter.

His heredity was unusual. He was the joint production of a wild-beast tamer father and a mother who was the daughter of a Navy surgeon. The senior Peace, having abandoned the subduing of beasts for the more peaceful trade of shoemaking, exchanged his life of travel for a home in

Sheffield. Charles, the youngest of four children, was born on May 14th, 1832.

His childhood was uneventful, chiefly noted for frequent acts of truancy. He displayed ingenuity in the making of mechanical toys, but hated consistent or prolonged work. After a brief and unsatisfactory period at school, he went to work in rolling-mills, and remained there until an accident to his hand sent him to the infirmary for the space of eighteen months. In that accident he lost several fingers of his left hand.

In the idleness that followed, young Peace strolled about the suburbs of Sheffield and contrived to find a number of shady friends. His first recorded crime was the stealing of a gold watch.

But watch-snatching did not satisfy the ambitious youth for any length of time, and in October, 1851, when he was a little more than 19 years old, Peace was convicted of burglary at a house in Sheffield and was sentenced to a comparatively short term of imprisonment.

On leaving gaol, he seems to have pursued for four years an honest, if vagabond, mode of life. As a boy, he had loved music and had been a violinist of some skill. He now travelled from fair to fair, and sometimes from tavern to tavern, performing on the fiddle, earning a modest but adequate living.

He was invariably popular. He had good social qualities, was a glib and amusing talker, and possessed what is sometimes called a "way" with women. It may be said at once, however, that Peace, although hardly a person of high moral character either in the narrow or the broad

sense, was never a wholesale lover. Two women held the high place in his life. If there were others, we have no record of them.

At the end of his four years' vagabondage, Peace, for some motive that has never been disclosed, suddenly resumed his criminal exploits, and on October 20th, 1855, was sentenced to a considerable term for a daring and ingenious burglary. He served his time, and behaved so well in prison that the period was reduced by his discharge on licence.

Again he took up his violin, and spent his afternoons playing in taverns; but the call of crime was now insistent, and he could not shut it out. Within a few months of his discharge from gaol he was arrested for breaking into the house of a lady in Manchester. He was caught by a clever move on the part of the police.

After robbing the house he had found himself unable to carry off the entire booty. He had, therefore, dug a hole in an adjoining field and hid the property, believing that he had carefully concealed the place of burial. Detectives covering the ground adjacent to the house on the following day saw signs of disturbed turf. They decided to keep a discreet surveillance and await events. At night Peace came to retrieve his booty. He was promptly seized and handcuffed.

For this exploit the burglar was given six years' penal servitude. It was a harsh sentence, and one may hazard the suggestion that the brutal methods of those Victorian days did much to foster crime. Prisons are not merely places of punishment and of possible reformation—they are too often (or were) schools of criminal development.

The modern scheme of segregation—of separating the young and newly-caught lambs from the old and hardened goats—is a fine experiment, but it has not been carried far enough. Even to-day a man frequently leaves prison knowing much more concerning crime than he knew when he entered.

Peace was evidently a home-lover. Sheffield seems to have had an everlasting attraction for him, and to that city he returned on his discharge from prison after serving the full term. In Sheffield, too, he had married in 1858 a Mrs. Hannah Ward, a young widow with one son. A son and daughter resulted from the marriage.

During the period of the eight years that followed his release, Peace seems to have engaged in a number of robberies. He was caught and convicted more than once, serving sentences in various prisons.

At Chatham he was flogged for taking part in a mutiny. When confined in Wakefield Prison he made a daring attempt to escape, an attempt that came very near to success. ~~Whilst doing repairs~~ in the gaol, he contrived to creep through a hole in the roof. Stealing over the tiles, he hid himself in the Governor's house, where he annexed a suit of civilian clothes in which he coolly dressed himself, having chosen a convenient bedroom for his toilet. However, he was caught on the threshold of the room and promptly taken back to his cell, being rewarded for his achievement by a period of bread-and-water and a remission of good-conduct marks.

In 1872 we find him living with his family in Sheffield, pursuing the somewhat unexciting occupation of picture-framing. Peace was

something of an artist. He frequently painted in water-colours and dabbled in designing. It is said that sometimes he would actually refuse to frame a picture that seemed to him an outrageous daub. At this period (a very short one) his standards of honesty seem to have approached his standards of artistic criticism, for he committed no robbery and lived a quiet, decent life, encouraging his children to attend church regularly, and even taking part in their religious training!

However, this exemplary condition of life was not to continue for any length of time. The family moved to Darnall, a suburb of Sheffield, and here Peace made the acquaintance of a man and woman who were destined to play tragic parts in his later career.

In a house close to the house of Peace and his family there lived a Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Dyson, an entirely commonplace pair. The young woman was good-looking, in an uneventful way, but was strongly endowed with that elusive thing called "sexual attraction". Peace immediately formed a violent desire for this woman and began to pay her aggressive attentions. In after years he swore that she had been his mistress, but Mrs. Dyson contradicted the assertion with a vehemence which impressed all those who heard it with its obvious truth. The chances are that she was innocent enough; that, weary of the monotony of home and her tame husband, she had accepted Peace's invitations to visit music-halls, taverns, and other places, without actually breaking any of the Commandments.



Peace certainly had some kind of attraction for women. An undersized little "rat of a man", as he was described by more than one person, he relied on his agile tongue and his glib humour. He was an acute and subtle flatterer—knew the weak side of women, and was quick to appeal to it.

Arthur Dyson bore the humiliation for some time with patience. Eventually, he had what is called a "scene" with his wife, ordered her to drop the acquaintance, and sent a brief note to the disturber of domestic harmony, beseeching him to leave his wife unmolested.

Peace was not the man to obey a request of this kind. On the contrary, he set himself to waylay Mrs. Dyson more assiduously than before, and so violent was his resentment against Dyson that on more than one occasion he threatened to blow out the man's brains.

Dyson, growing afraid, applied for a warrant against Peace. The warrant was issued, but before it could be served Peace had decided to leave Sheffield. Why he took this step is something of a mystery. A man who had undergone long terms of imprisonment for serious crimes could hardly have dreaded a visit to a local county- or police-court. The fact remains that he went, and the family having settled at Hull, Mrs. Peace opened an eating-house for working men.

Peace, however, had no intention of settling down as a *restaurateur*. The old lure had got him, and he broke into houses whenever a convenient opportunity came his way.

It was whilst engaged on a burglary expedition

in a suburb of Manchester that Peace committed the first murder of his career. He had always boasted that he shrunk from taking life, that he had never fired on any man. but perhaps this immunity from bloodshed was due to luck rather than to any humanitarian principle. At Whalley Range he came near to being caught in the act of robbery, and he fired and killed!

Emerging from the house, he almost ran into the arms of a constable who had seen a light and was about to whistle for assistance. This constable, Cock by name, was a plucky fellow. Without waiting for aid he darted after the thief who, however, contrived to elude him. Covering the policeman with his revolver, Peace shouted at the man to stand back. Cock advanced, and Peace then fired wide of him. Perceiving that the man still advanced, Peace again pulled the trigger. Cock fell instantly, and his assailant made good his escape without difficulty.

Two brothers, John and William Habron, were arrested and tried for the murder of Cock. The evidence against them was of the thinnest kind. To-day, one imagines that the Grand Jury would have thrown out the bill, but half a century ago men were frequently tried and convicted on evidence of a sort which would carry small weight in our own time.

John Habron was acquitted. Evidently the judge had strong doubts of the guilt of his brother, for his summing-up was entirely in his favour. He pointed out that the chief evidence against the prisoner was the fact that he had been heard to utter threats against the dead

constable, who had summoned him and his brother for some trivial offence. There was also the fact that William had made no attempt to prove an alibi on the night of the murder. But neither fact was in itself ultimately a proof of guilt. The jury, however, took another view, and a verdict of "Wilful Murder" was returned.

The Court of Criminal Appeal was in those remote days unborn and undreamed. However, public feeling was opposed to the verdict. A strong petition was presented to the Home Secretary. Habron was reprieved and sent to penal servitude for life.

Peace actually attended the two days' trial of the brothers, probably gloating over the fact that he sat in the gallery of the court and not in another place. After the trial he returned to Hull, but from time to time paid visits to Sheffield, where he continued to molest Mrs. Dyson. Whether he was genuinely in love with the young woman it is difficult to determine. Perhaps his extraordinary persistence was due rather to a certain egotism that revolted against the acceptance of rebuffs.

Whatever the motive he went on with his mad courtship. After having made several unsuccessful attempts to see Mrs. Dyson, he lay in wait for her on the evening of November 29th, 1876, at the rear of the house in Banner Cross, to which suburb the Dysons had recently moved from Darnall.

Watching the building, he saw the young woman come out. He approached her. There was a brief sharp quarrel and Peace then threatened her with his revolver. A moment

later Arthur Dyson rushed out of the house. The two men faced each other and Peace, having rapped out some violent oaths, turned to go. Dyson followed, whereupon Peace fired a shot that missed him. He then fired for the second time. Dyson fell at once, shot through the temple.

Once again luck favoured Peace, and he contrived to escape. Arrived in Hull, he went to his wife's eating-house, where he immediately proceeded to assume a disguise. He shaved his beard that was turning grey, dyed his hair, and wore benevolent-looking spectacles.

Seated in the little room at the rear of the restaurant calmly eating his dinner, Peace overheard detectives inquiring concerning him in the front shop. He fled upstairs, got through the roof, and hid behind a huge chimney until the police had gone, Mrs. Peace having satisfied them that her husband was engaged on a picture-framing "job" many miles away.

The authorities immediately offered a reward for the apprehension of the murderer of Arthur Dyson. The country was placarded with bills that ran thus:

#### ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD!

WANTED FOR MURDER on November 29th, Charles Peace. He is thin, small-built, from 55 to 60 years of age, grey, nearly white hair, beard and whiskers. Lacks use of three fingers on left hand, walks with his legs wide apart, and speaks peculiarly as though his tongue were too large for his mouth. He is a great boaster. Is a picture-frame maker and also repairs and cleans clocks and watches, and sometimes deals in oleographs, engravings, and pictures. Has been in penal servitude for burglary in Manchester. Has lived in Manchester, Salford, Liverpool, and Hull.

The age quoted in this announcement was wrong. Peace was at the time of the murder of Arthur Dyson a few months past his forty-fourth birthday. He was a man, however, who in early middle-life gave the impression of age, partly through premature greyness and partly through certain furrows doubtless cut by a habit of deep thought. Peace was that rare criminal—a man given to meditation. He would sometimes pass many hours without uttering a word, though when in the company of congenial people was glib to the point of garrulousness.

Peace probably read the description of himself with sardonic amusement, realizing how utterly misleading was the portrait, except in regard to his maimed hand. However, he speedily disguised this possible means of identification by the use of an arm made of gutta-percha. Into this appliance he thrust his genuine arm, attaching to the end a sort of hook which served as a substitute for his hand.

He now began an existence of regular and consistent burglary. Between the years 1876 and 1877 he was rarely at any fixed abode for any length of time. He was constantly travelling from town to town, carrying out audacious robberies. Doncaster, Bristol, Bath, Oxford, Birmingham—he visited all these places, and invariably left marks of his passage.

During a sojourn at Nottingham he lodged at the house of a Mrs. Adamson. This lady was a receiver of stolen goods. Her entourage was in keeping with her trade. Queer people came to the house, and among the visitors was a young woman, Susan Grey. At that

time she was living under the protection of a Mr. Bailey, whose name she had adopted. She was good-looking, thirty-five years old, educated, to some extent, and apparently a person of some attractiveness.

Although Peace seems to have retained to the end of his career a sort of affection for his wife, he did not allow that affection to interfere with other loves. Hardly had he made the acquaintance of "Mrs. Bailey" before he was threatening to kill her unless she abandoned her protector and came to live with himself.

Susan Bailey evidently did not require much pressure. She made no attempt to resist her lightning lover, and the two began house-keeping under the name of "Mr. and Mrs. Thompson". "Thompson" was one of Peace's many aliases—"noms de crime", if the phrase may be forgiven.

In Nottingham, Peace pursued his nightly profession, frequently gaining valuable information from Mrs Adamson concerning potential robberies. It is clear that he must have acquired a huge amount of valuable property during his life, but like most thieves he died a very poor man. Crime is not a paying business. The "receivers" take the lion's share of the profit and the minimum of risk. Jewels, or other valuable things, which in the ordinary market might fetch £1,000, are frequently bought by a "receiver" for one-tenth of that sum. In view of this fact one can hardly wonder that the criminal is rarely a millionaire.

After a space spent at Nottingham, Peace seems to have developed a desire to see his

wife and children. He went to Hull with his mistress, whom he introduced to Mrs. Peace as a "very good friend". The wife apparently accepted the situation philosophically enough, and the two women became good friends. The pair lodged at the house of a police-sergeant. This was possibly an act of bravado on the part of the criminal, or it may have been that he imagined himself so secure that he could afford to hover near the enemy's camp.

Hull was no holiday, however, for this industrious adventurer. He rarely let a night pass without a minor or major burglary. The people of the town became panic-stricken. Peace suddenly realized that a prolonged stay might lead to danger. He returned to Nottingham, and "Mrs. Thompson" accompanied him.

Meantime, the police were still searching for the murderer of Arthur Dyson. By some fluke they actually contrived to trace Peace to his lodgings in Nottingham. He received the detectives in bed, swore that his name was Ward, and that he had never been in Sheffield. He lied with artistic genius, and the police were satisfied. They went away, apologizing for their blunder.

After a second visit to Hull to see his family, Peace resolved to abandon the provinces and try his powers on a larger stage. He travelled with his mistress to London.

The "Thompsons" began their metropolitan life at a lodging-house in Lambeth close to St. Thomas's Hospital. Here Peace carried on a desultory business in musical instruments,

going out at night to indulge his passion for a more exciting form of livelihood.

After a few months at Lambeth, Peace took a house in East Terrace, Peckham. It was a strange *ménage*—a combination of the most bourgeois respectability in some respects with the rankest Bohemianism in other respects. For whilst Peace lived the life of an orthodox suburban householder, with musical tastes and quiet habits, he maintained a double domestic entourage. In the basement there lived his wife and her son Willie Ward. On the ground floor Peace and his mistress held their squalid state.

Apparently the queerly assorted women lived together more or less harmoniously. One can only surmise that both were accommodating, or that Charles Peace was a masterful sultan. The latter theory is the more feasible. Although on most occasions he treated both ladies with kindness, he could be brutal when he chose, and corporal punishment was his usual method. He was not the son of a wild-beast tamer for naught!

Peace, during his life at Peckham, was almost painfully "respectable". He attended church with regularity; supervised the religious education of his children; paid his tradesmen's bills on presentation; and took a sane and moderate interest in public affairs. He was in considerable demand at suburban tea-parties and other mild revels, where his violin formed a decided attraction. He talked incessantly when not violin-playing, discussing politics, social questions, humanitarianism, prison-reform,



invariably posing as an authority on art and music.

Throughout this period he went on his midnight expeditions. No bank-clerk added up his ledgers more methodically and assiduously than Peace rifled the houses of sleeping citizens. He always carried an elaborate set of tools, including a rope-ladder, a life-preserver, and, of course, the inevitable revolver.

The southern suburbs of London formed his chief hunting-ground, but sometimes he went as far afield as Hampshire and Sussex. Invariably he worked alone. He was too much of a cynic to believe in the possibility of honour among thieves. Indeed, he attributed his very rare captures to this fact of insulated effort. "A man has more to fear from his pals than from the police," he would say, and the remark was probably justified.

And now we find Charles Peace at the summit of his career; at the Ultima Thule, perhaps, of his ambitions, if he ever took the trouble to formulate such ambitions.

He lived in a handsome house; had an affectionate, if unconventional entourage; was flattered and petted in every suburban home he visited; and was carrying on his work at night smoothly and profitably. Moreover, in the daytime he was amusing himself with the design of mechanical inventions. He actually took out patents for contrivances for raising sunken ships, for a smoke-helmet for firemen, and for a novel form of hydraulic tank. His days were spent in congenial and honest labour, and all was going well. It was possible, he told himself,

that he would live to be eighty, and die in the odour of Peckham sanctity, to be remembered hereafter as an inventor, and a benefactor of ship-owners, firemen, and hydraulic tank merchants.

But that admirable, if somewhat commonplace finale, was not destined for Charles Peace. There came a night, the night of October 10th, 1878, when he set out to break into a house in St. John's Park, Blackheath. He entered the building and set to work. Meantime, a constable, Charles Robinson, had seen a light in a window—a light unusual at that hour. Rendered suspicious by the circumstance and by the fact that Blackheath had been the scene of recent incessant burglaries, he at once called to a colleague. Before, however, this other could arrive, Peace had leaped through the window, had caught sight of the policeman, and had made off. Robinson followed him, shouting to the burglar to stop. Peace turned, levelled his revolver and, having uttered a sharp warning, fired three shots in succession. The plucky constable then closed with his man, receiving immediately a bullet in his arm. However, he contrived to hold on to his prisoner and get him on the ground, where he held him securely until assistance arrived.

Peace fought desperately, but was soon overpowered, handcuffed, and conveyed to the local station. Next morning, when brought up at Greenwich Police-Court, he refused to give his name or any information. He was wearing a walnut-juice make-up that gave him a semi-negro appearance.

In these scientific days of finger-print records the local authorities would have been in possession of Peace's name, aliases, and every conviction registered against him within twenty-four hours. In 1878 the Bertillon method was yet to be discovered. However, the police had their methods, crude but not altogether unfruitful. A letter which the unknown "half-caste" contrived to send to his mistress during the first week of his detention put them on the track of his identity.

The trail, if we may use the word in this connection, led them from the house at Peckham to Nottingham, to Hull, and finally to Sheffield, where Mrs. Peace lived after leaving London on the arrest of her husband. In that house, after prolonged search and much clever investigation, they found evidence which proved the identity of the Blackheath burglar with Charles Peace, the man "wanted" for the murder of Arthur Dyson two years ago.

Witnesses were speedily procured who had known Peace intimately in Sheffield and elsewhere. Among them was a police-constable, who picked out the burglar from a dozen other prisoners paraded before him in the yard at Newgate Prison.

Justice works with a certain formality. It was necessary that before Peace could stand his trial for the alleged murder of Arthur Dyson he must be indicted on the charge of burglary and the attempted killing of the constable at Blackheath. The trial opened on November 19th, 1878, before Mr. Justice Hawkins (afterwards Lord Brampton).

This judge, one of the severest that ever sat on the bench of the Old Bailey, was the terror of every criminal. Men sometimes fainted with horror when told that they were to stand their trial before Hawkins! Bluff and jovial in Society and on the racecourse (for he loved a race and a bet as well as any gambler that he ever sentenced), he was a changed creature in court. Even the officials and the attendants trembled when he spoke. Nevertheless, Hawkins was by no means a brutal person. His theory was that every leniency should be shown to the young and accidental offender, but that the old and "professional" criminal should be treated without any kind of mercy.

Peace accordingly knew exactly what he might expect when he stepped into the dock on the morning of November 19th. He was perfectly calm, nodded to his friends in court, and settled down to listen to the evidence with a cool and even contemptuous manner.

Montagu Williams, Q.C. (a very remarkable counsel, who died comparatively young), defended Peace, but realized that he had no case. The jury found the prisoner guilty of burglary and of attempted murder. Asked if he had anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon him, Peace began to whine, and mumbled some words to the effect that he had disgraced himself; that he was not fit to live or to die; and, finally, that he hoped the judge would show him some mercy. Hawkins instantly showed his appreciation of the request by sentencing the prisoner to penal servitude for life!

He was removed to Pentonville Prison where

he served two months of his sentence. Meantime, the detectives had been industriously following up certain clues already secured and had completed the last link in the chain of the evidence required to arrest Peace on the capital charge. A member of the Criminal Investigation Department had gone out to America and traced Mrs. Dyson to Cleveland, where she was then living. This woman was brought back to England to give evidence against her old admirer.

The last act in the drama of Peace's life was now at hand, but before it could be staged there happened an incident that nearly terminated the drama in a manner unforeseen by the authorities. It happened thus:

Peace had been taken from Pentonville Prison and formally charged at Sheffield with the murder of Dyson. Whilst under remand he was again detained at Pentonville, being technically still a convict serving a life-sentence in that prison.

On January 22nd, 1879, whilst being again conveyed in the train from London to Sheffield, the convict made a remarkable attempt to escape. Having taken advantage of the two warders being engaged in conversation concerning a wager, he flew through the window. The train was travelling at a very high speed, and the warders seem to have lost their heads. Instead of stopping the train by means of the communication cord, they endeavoured to hold on to the convict's feet, and Peace was therefore carried along by the express with his head downwards. Eventually, with a wonderful effort, he managed to kick off a shoe, and dropped on the track. Later, when the train was brought

to a standstill, Peace was discovered two miles down the line, bleeding and unconscious.

But certainly not dead! The vitality of the hardened criminal is one of the amazing phenomena of his tribe. In ordinary times they apparently escape much of the sickness and many of the smaller ills that afflict honest citizens. Perhaps the excitement of their calling stimulates the action of the blood. Peace, always a man of extraordinary constitution, actually recovered from his severe injuries in eight days.

He faced the magistrates for the second time, and after a short hearing, in the course of which his counsel, a Mr. Clegg, made a very ingenious attempt to prove that Peace had shot Dyson in self-defence, the court committed the prisoner to take his trial on the charge of Wilful Murder at the Leeds Assizes. He was immediately removed to Armley Prison, Leeds, to await the opening of the Assizes during the following week.

On February 4th, 1879, Peace entered the dock for the last time. It was a place well-known to him—he must have felt at home there—but it is more than probable that he realized that the issue this time was of grave importance. He was pale and haggard, and seemed to have aged a great deal. A small, crouching figure, the eyes bloodshot, the head covered with bandages, and the body all a-quiver, Peace presented to any moralist who was in court a picture made to his hand. Here was the finish of a life of crime, and it certainly did not amount to much!

Only two months had passed since Peace had been tried and sentenced at the Old Bailey for the burglary at Blackheath and the attempted murder of the constable. Perhaps his experience was unique. To few men has it been given to undergo two criminal trials within the space of a few weeks.

The judge on this occasion was Mr. Justice Lopes, a sound lawyer and a very reserved man. He rarely wore the cap-and-bells of the judicial humorist. Mr. Campbell Foster, Q.C., led for the prosecution, and Mr. Frank (afterwards Sir Frank) Lockwood for the defence.

The first witness for the Crown was Mrs. Dyson. In quiet tones she related how on the night of November 29th, 1876, she came from the outhouse at the rear of her home in Banner Cross Terrace, and saw Peace standing with a revolver in his hand. He cried out at once: "Speak, or I'll fire!" She then went on to relate the events which have already been recorded that culminated in the shooting of her husband.

In cross-examination Lockwood endeavoured to shake her evidence that Peace had made an unprovoked attack. He suggested that after the first harmless shot which the prisoner had fired in mere bravado Dyson had closed with him, and that, in the struggle to snatch the revolver from Peace, the bullet had been discharged that killed Dyson. However, the witness vigorously denied this suggestion. She swore that her husband had never come near enough to Peace to lay hands upon him.

In further cross-examination the woman, being hard-pressed by Lockwood, admitted a mild

friendship with the prisoner—that she had undertaken journeys with him to Manchester, and had several times gone to music-halls and fairs in his company. The object of this cross-examination, of course, was to prove the intimacy between the two people, and to convince the jury that Dyson, overcome with jealousy, had intended to make a serious attack on the supposed seducer of his wife.

The woman stuck to her original statement that she had never been the mistress of Peace; that, in fact, she had always disliked him, and had begged him to leave her unmolested. On the other hand Peace maintained to the end that their intimacy had been complete and frequent.

Five independent witnesses gave evidence as to the presence of Peace in Banner Cross on the night of November 29th. A labourer named Brassington said that Peace accosted him, showed him some letters, and then made inquiries regarding the Dysons. Brassington added that Peace told him he intended to shoot these people, or to do them some kind of injury. Evidence was then given by three witnesses who had heard Peace utter similar threats as far back as July, 1876.

The revolver taken from him after he shot the police-constable Robinson in the autumn of the preceding year was then produced. The rifling of the bullet that had killed Mr. Dyson was shown to be identical with that of the bullet fired from Peace's revolver at Blackheath.

Frank Lockwood did his utmost for his client, but probably realized that he was fighting a hopeless cause. He made a very strong point



of the jealousy motive, showing that Dyson had entertained a very natural dislike of the prisoner and that the emotion had come to its crisis on the night of the 29th. He then proceeded to draw a vivid picture of the encounter and of the struggle which he suggested had preceded the shot. He pointed out that there was only the evidence of one witness to disprove the theory of the struggle. That witness was Mrs. Dyson, and she was a prejudiced party.

Mr. Justice Lopes, in summing-up, showed a certain bias of a purely legitimate kind against the defence. The struggle, he told the jury, was purely a matter of surmise on the part of counsel. The latter was entirely justified in relying on that defence, and in endeavouring to weaken the evidence of Mrs. Dyson, but, in his opinion, there was a huge amount of extraneous testimony to prove that the shot was fired deliberately and with intent to injure. That Peace had uttered threats and held a violent hatred for Dyson had been proved by more than one witness. In his lordship's view, there was not the slightest evidence to point to a struggle of any kind.

Evidently the jury had few doubts concerning the facts, for they were absent from court only for a few minutes. They retired at 7.15 p.m. and returned at 7.25 p.m.

Peace, who had been taken below during the interval, was brought back into the dock. His small figure appeared more shrunken than before; his eyes were blazing with excitement; his hands shook.

In answer to the question of the official, the

foreman of the jury replied almost in a whisper: "We find him guilty." Peace at once became calm. All the excitement faded from his eyes; he leaned his elbows upon the dock and seemed resigned, confident. He watched the judge assume the black cap with an expression which was aloof and almost contemptuous.

The death sentence was delivered with the usual long-windedness of those days. To-day, judges are humane enough to cut down their homilies to the shortest possible number of words, but in 1879 England was only less than half a century distant from the spacious times of public hangings. The cruelty of forcing a condemned wretch to listen to a long sermon on the evil of his ways before sentencing him to be strung up at the end of a rope evidently did not occur to the judges, who frequently appeared to revel in their unctuous utterances.

Peace listened to the discourse with indifference. At the end of it he shrugged his narrow shoulders, waved his hand to some people in the court, and went down the steps of the dock, passing, as he went, from the eyes of the living world.

Unlike many men of evil lives Peace does not seem to have implanted lasting affection in the hearts of the women with whom he was associated. It is true that his wife was loyal enough, but her love seems to have been a very milk-and-water affair. Mrs. Thompson was business-like enough to apply to the authorities for the £100 reward they had offered for the apprehension of Peace. She pointed out that the information she had given the police had enabled them to

arrest their man, but there was some controversy on the subject, and whether or not she received the price of her services is a matter of conjecture.

In spite of her commercial attitude towards her lover, she apparently still held some kind of affection for him. The woman made several attempts to see Peace during his last weeks in Armley Gaol. However, the authorities, for reasons best known to themselves, opposed the visit, and the relatives of the murderer supported the objection. These two—Peace and Sue Thompson—did not meet again. Nor did Peace show the least desire to indulge in any farewell outburst.

The exact relations between Peace and Mrs. Dyson it is impossible to determine, nor is the matter of importance. It suffices to know that whatever those relations may have been in early days, she hated him with real hatred at a later stage. In speaking of him to the detective who came to Cleveland to take her to England, she vilified her old admirer in picturesque terms. "Peace is not a man, he is a devil," said this moralist. "Shakespeare himself was not adequate to describe his villainy!" She added that her lifelong regret must be that she had ever known so despicable a creature. Poor Peace! The epitaph of kindness usually recorded by some woman concerning the worst ruffian was not spoken for him.

One imagines, however, that he was now indifferent to old loves and hates. One of his first acts whilst awaiting his death was to send for the Governor of Armley Gaol and record a

full confession of his killing of the Police-Constable Cock at Whalley Range. Moreover, he drew up a detailed plan of the house and grounds, showing the exact spot where he had fired on the victim. After signing the confession he said to the Governor: "Now that I am to forfeit my life and have nothing to gain by further concealment, I think it right before God and man to clear this innocent person."

William Habron, after certain formalities, was set free. The delicious irony was again rehearsed; and he was informed that Her Majesty had graciously extended to him a free pardon for a crime of which he was entirely innocent. The Treasury awarded him a small money compensation, but his case affords a terrible proof of the tragic mistakes which even the most benevolent Courts of Justice may sometimes perpetrate.

And now Charles Peace turned his thoughts to a repentance which certainly seemed sincere. He encouraged the visits of the gaol chaplain, and was delighted when his old friend, Mr. Littlewood, the Vicar of Darnall, came to see him. He told this gentleman that he would undergo any suffering if he might cancel his evil past. Mr. Littlewood was convinced of the genuineness of the man's repentance. Or was it remorse? There is a world of difference.

A few minutes before the vicar left the cell, Peace asked him to be kind enough to preach a special sermon on his fate as a warning to young people. One seems to perceive here the egotism of the criminal. Even after he is dead he wishes to be spoken of, even though his character is used as a symbol of evil. .

His health in prison during the time of waiting was feeble, but his spirits were good. He wrote many letters to friends and relatives, all of these letters crowded with advice regarding conduct and morals. Apparently he saw nothing of irony in this attitude of preacher and moralist.

The last visit of his wife and daughter took place on the afternoon previous to February 25th, 1879, the day fixed for the execution. He begged them to be calm, as he wished to keep his mind undisturbed, probably ignorant of the fact that another "criminal" of an entirely different hue—a "criminal" called Socrates—made a similar request to his wife in his cell at Athens. A little later Peace suggested that they should offer up a prayer. The three then knelt down and prayed for a long time. Presently a warder came and took them away, and Peace, with a wave of his hand, made his farewell.

On the last night of his life this amazing man slept calmly. At six he woke, dressed, ate a good meal, and then sat down to write letters until the moment fixed for the execution.

William Marwood was the executioner. This man was something of a personality. He claimed to have invented the merciful method of hanging which is in vogue to-day. Previous to the coming of Marwood the executions had been long-drawn-out and had caused great suffering. Calcraft, his predecessor, was a kindly person, but a most incompetent and clumsy workman.

Marwood took his "profession" seriously. He was a man of some intelligence, and among other intellectual feats wrote a pamphlet showing how the National Debt might be reduced.

He resented the bad odour that clung to his calling. "I do my work as a shoemaker during the day," he said, "and at night I sleep like a babe. In executing guilty people I am only doing God's work, and I do it as a matter of duty and as a good Christian." This conscientious personage invariably said a prayer for guidance on the morning of his work!

A few minutes before the moment of dispatch Peace sent for the man and begged him to do his task without causing him pain. Marwood solemnly assured him that he should suffer nothing at his hands. The pair then shook hands, and the pinioning process followed. It was performed with great swiftness, and the procession to the scaffold was formed.

But Peace had no intention of being hurried out of life without some further speech-making. His love of talking persisted. When he arrived in the execution yard he asked if he might address the Press representatives. He then made a short speech, in which he begged them to consider the error of their ways and to be warned by his example. One recalls a circular once issued (many years ago) by a certain religious organization—a circular which invited the public to attend a meeting which would be distinguished by the presence of "two converted burglars and three reformed journalists"!

The homily ended, he stepped on to the scaffold, asked a blessing on the Governor of the gaol and the other officials, and then petitioned a glass of water. However, by this time the

authorities were growing impatient. The Governor signed to Marwood, the bolt was drawn, and the drop fell. Marwood kept his promise, for Peace died instantaneously. The usual inquest was held, and the remains of the convict, after being soaked in lime, were buried in the yard of Armley Prison.

The methods of Peace in carrying out his robberies deserve some comment. His plan was to go about his work with the calmness and methodical persistence of the ordinary honest toiler. He rarely hurried. If he heard the sound of steps approaching, this cool-blooded thief would continue the task on which he was engaged, trusting to his usual good fortune to finish it without interruption. He relied, moreover, on the dread induced by the firearms which he invariably carried. One of his favourite methods was to lock the door of the room in which he was working. If a key were not in the lock he would wedge or screw up the door.

He hid in all sorts of unexpected places. A "grandfather's" clock sheltered him on one occasion when disturbed on a midnight visit to a house in Hemsworth, Yorkshire. On another occasion he actually jumped into a bed, and, covering himself with the clothes and lying flat, was not seen by the person who had come to find out the cause of a sudden noise. When the man had gone back to bed Peace calmly resumed his operations.

Although nearly fifty years have passed since this extraordinary person was hurried out of an unappreciative world, his name is still

remembered, and has, indeed, become almost a national synonym for the genus burglar, ranking with the "Bill Sikes" of Dickens. But there was a brutality and coarseness about the fictional villain never associated with Peace. His place, perhaps, is rather with the more romantic ruffians of the Dick Turpin, Ned Kelly, and Jack Sheppard order. To this day the lesser journals of the populace set forth in lurid language his exploits. A hundred "life-stories" of Peace have been written, and many incidents have been introduced which would have surprised Peace could he come back from the shades to read them. In some of these kitchen-fictions Peace has been glorified as lover and Juan; in others, his crimes have held the high place, and the "love interest" has been merely a lurid background.

In the first part of the nineteenth century nurses would often frighten their charges with threats of the bogey of St. Helena. Equally, in the last quarter of the same century, they bestowed a similar distinction upon Charles Peace. To become a tradition and a "bogey" is a double honour not given to every man. One imagines that Peace, with his unconquerable egotism, would have found pride and solace in the knowledge.





JEANNE AMENAIDE BRÉCOURT

1837-?



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VITRIOL has played so frequent a part in what are sometimes called *crimes passionels* that the case of Jeanne Amenaide Brécourt would hardly call for more than a passing reference but for the amazing and exceptional circumstances that attended the blinding of her victim. The act of vitriol-throwing, in the majority of instances, has been a mere act of commonplace revenge. In the case of this woman there was another motive, more sinister, more sordid, more callous.

The tolerant judge of human weaknesses can perhaps feel some fraction of sympathy with a deserted woman overcome by the madness of an impulse to which she yields. For the woman, however, with whom this record deals, there can be no sympathy. She planned her diabolical deed as coolly as an author plans his story; she was driven by the stark, overwhelming egotism of the born criminal.

Jeanne Amenaide Brécourt was born in Paris in 1837. Her father was a printer, her mother a seller of vegetables in the Halles of the city. From the earliest moment of childhood Jeanne was erratic, mischievous, and vain to the point

of absurdity. When little more than a babe she stamped her foot with rage because a certain frock did not appeal to her. Forced to wear the frock, she presently cut it to shreds!

This enterprising child did not remain long in the family Brécourt. Doubtless her relatives were not sorry to accept the invitation of a certain woman of considerable social position, who suggested that she should adopt Jeanne and give her an excellent education. To this woman's home the child went, and remained there for a number of years.

However, although the benefactress had adopted Jeanne, she had no intention of educating her for a career of idleness. Before she was seventeen Jeanne was sent to work in a silk factory, the Baroness, her patron, having used her influence to secure the young woman the occupation.

Work was not included in Jeanne's scheme of life. She hated it with almost maniacal hate. She set herself to find some means of living without toil. Very soon she found a way of escape. It came in the shape of marriage, and the man who won her first affections (such as they were) was a young grocer named Gras, who frequently came to the house of the Baroness in connection with his trade.

The marriage was a lightning affair. It was not more successful than abrupt marriages of the kind usually prove. There were everlasting quarrels—sometimes the pair came to blows. Eventually they separated, Gras vanishing from Paris, and Jeanne likewise seeking fresh fields of adventure in the provinces.

It is said that, during the time which elapsed

between her exit from Paris and her return, she did many queer things. Perhaps the most respectable of them was an attempt to earn a living by writing. However, this effort failed, and she returned to Paris a full-blown courtesan.

Her experiences had, doubtless, been of the sort that does not tend to place men on a pedestal. Jeanne was now filled not merely with a dislike of men, but with a contempt almost Satanic in its depth. She confessed that she now regarded the masculine animal as a thing to be exploited without mercy.

Her philosophy of life is summed up in her own words:

"Everything in this world is lies and dust," she said. "So much the worse for the men who get in my path. As soon as they fail me or bore me or are played out in regard to what they can spend upon me, I have no further use for them."

However, although Jeanne was ready to bleed her male friends to the last drop, the process does not seem to have been profitable. She was always more or less in money difficulties.

Among her other accomplishments was a gift for blackmail. She exercised this gift with the utmost callousness. No man was safe. She would fawn upon some half-drunken young fool during a night of erotic passion (for she was sensual to an inordinate degree), and in the morning would proceed to blackmail him. One man, driven to despair, killed himself. Another, rendered a nervous wreck through her demands upon his physical resources, died in an asylum. Wherever Jeanne penetrated, she brought ruin to health, to peace of mind, and, incidentally,

to the exchequers of her victims. Imagine a pestilence of Nature embodied in a woman, and the picture of this Jeanne Brécourt is complete!

Presently she dropped the name of Brécourt and called herself Jeanne de la Cour, adding to it the title of "Baroness". Whilst staying for a time in Vitel she heard the gratifying news of the death of M. Gras.

The instant she realized that she was free to marry again she began to make plans for the future, realizing, however, that her youth was spent and that she had reached a time when a profitable marriage might not be an easy achievement. She was between thirty-five and forty, but, in spite of paint and cosmetics, looked considerably older. Her life had not been the sort that tends to maintain youth.

And now Jeanne discovered that her hold on the sex which she despised and hated was fast weakening to an alarming degree. She was able to make specious conquests, but no man stayed with her for any length of time.

The woman began to despair. What was to be her next move? Work was out of the question, and the blackmailing process could not be carried on without potential victims in the form of lovers.

It was at this time—when she was forty-six years old—that she met at a public dance-hall a young man, George de Saint Pierre. He was of excellent family and had considerable "expectations". This youth of twenty formed a passionate attachment for the woman of forty-six. Very soon they became friends, and eventually there

followed a liaison that endured for three years without break.

Saint Pierre apparently idolized his middle-aged mistress, of whose character he was, of course, entirely innocent. She represented herself as a widow who had met many vicissitudes, through all of which she had come "unspotted from the world". Saint Pierre, young, ingenuous, and above all infatuated by the staling charms of the woman, looked upon her as a saint to whom the world had been harsh, and even merciless. He told her that he would try and make her life so happy that she would forget all that had gone before.

She must have been a remarkable actress, this Jeanne de la Cour, as she now called herself, for it argues conspicuous dramatic talent when a woman can so eliminate all traces of the primrose path and pose as a heroine of the "more sinned against than sinning" type. Jeanne realized that Saint Pierre loved and pitied her sufficiently to desire to offer her a protection more permanent, more confident, than the protection offered by a mere lover. He was ready and anxious to make her his wife. He held back because, like most young Frenchmen, he was very much under the influence of his family.

Thus we find the youth writing to her from his home in the country that he is "perfectly well and moderately happy, but sorely perplexed by certain difficulties that have arisen between myself and my dear parents".

Immediately Jeanne guessed the cause of these "difficulties". She realized how strong was the opposition with which she was now



faced. There was the possibility that she might lose not only a husband but even a lover!

She must have puzzled a great deal in those days, asking herself how to surmount this problem. Quite suddenly, however, the solution came. It happened thus:

A young actress friend had recently married a blind man. The pair came to Jeanne's house, and she was struck by the sight of the young husband's pathetic dependence upon his wife. The latter, evidently a cynical personage, confided to Jeanne her views.

"People pity me for marrying a blind man," said this practical-minded young woman. "But it has its advantages. You see, I need feel no anxiety about him. He cannot leave me, for he knows that no other person would put up with him in his helpless state. Moreover, I have freedom to come and go as I choose. In other words, I have most of the advantages of marriage with very few of its drawbacks."

One imagines that the average woman would have been horrified by this cynical avowal. Jeanne Brécourt showed huge interest, but no other emotion. The incident of the blind man, as dependent on his wife as a baby on its mother, fired her blood. She began to turn over the picture in her brain. It fascinated her. Gradually there was born in her mind a scheme, which she proceeded to develop.

Years ago, in her childhood, she had had for playmate a boy called Nathalis Gaudry. After serving in the Army and wandering through the world, Gaudry had returned to Paris and found employment in an oil-refining factory,

where he was held to be a good and honest workman. Some chance brought Jeanne and her old playfellow together, and the man immediately conceived for her one of those amazing passions that sometimes afflict the middle-aged.

His offer of marriage being, of course, rejected, he begged her to let him occupy some less formal position than husband. At first, Jeanne refused with indignation, telling him that she had finished with men; that she intended to devote the remainder of her life to serious endeavour.

However, immediately after the woman had decided that she would take some means of blinding her lover so that she might retain him at her side, she sent for Gaudry and promised him every solace he could desire, providing he was willing to aid her in what she called a scheme of vengeance.

A man (she told the dupe) had been the "ruin" of her life. He had not only deceived her with callous brutality, he had beaten her, robbed her, and caused her inconceivable humiliation. If she could punish this man she would be satisfied, and would be ready to give herself to Gaudry when the punishment was complete.

The man Gaudry appears to have been a weak-minded creature, obsessed by animal passion. When Jeanne suggested that he should lie in wait for Saint Pierre and maim him to the point of death, he refused, saying that a soldier could not bring himself to strike a treacherous blow. However, a few kisses caused him to waver, and he promised to do whatever she directed.

The idea of maiming Saint Pierre, however,

was soon abandoned. Perhaps she imagined that blindness would prove a more effective means of retaining his presence beside her than a mere crippling of limb. A little later she again met Gaudry by appointment, and detailed her plan.

Vitriol was to be used to blind the supposed "betrayers" of innocence. Again Gaudry hesitated, and again some perfunctory kisses caused his feeble brain to yield. The woman then told him that she had procured some oil of vitriol on the plea that she needed the acid for cleaning purposes. On a certain night, yet to be arranged, Gaudry was to hide himself in the shadow of a small pavilion that adjoined the house in which she lived. She would prevail on Saint Pierre to take her to a theatre or concert. On their return, she would find a pretext for sending him on in front of her to open the gate. The instant he approached, Gaudry, from his place of concealment, was to fling the contents of the bottle in the young man's face. No detail was left unconsidered by this callous monster. Nor did the cruelty of the contemplated crime agitate her in the least degree.

Gaudry was undoubtedly the lesser criminal. He was probably in that semi-powerless condition to which certain men who live entirely through their appetites are frequently reduced. The bribe which the woman held out to him was overwhelming. She had promised more than once that she would refuse him nothing after the satisfactory carrying-out of the horrible mission.

George de Saint Pierre returned to Paris from his country home and at once renewed

his relations with Jeanne. She perceived, however, a decided change in the young man. He was listless, gloomy, absent-minded. He spoke of the disagreements which had arisen between his family and himself. It was clear to her that he was wavering. It was clear, moreover, that although he still cared for her to some extent, his passion was no longer of that temperature that it would survive heavy attacks from outside.

This knowledge stiffened her resolution. She told herself there could be no holding back. Making a pretence of cheering him, she said gaily:

"The country has depressed you. You want amusement, music, enjoyment. To-morrow evening we will go to the Opera. We both love music, and it will make us forget the sordid realities of life."

On the following afternoon when Saint Pierre was away for an hour, Gaudry called at the house and received his final instructions. At the same time the woman handed him the vitriol. She then impressed upon him that he was to wait in her apartments throughout the evening. At the first sound of the bell in the outer courtyard he was to descend and hide himself in the place she had already indicated.

Having repeated the instructions so that there might be no misunderstanding, the woman hurried away to keep an appointment with Saint Pierre. Throughout the afternoon preceding the visit to the Opera she chatted, coaxed, and made love with a lightness of heart which was perhaps entirely sincere.

Her mind, however, must have been busy with the event that was so near. Of what did she think as she wandered through the Bois with her companion? Did she foreshadow the future, seeing it as a time of ease, of domestic respectability? Or did she even at that early moment allow her lascivious brain to dwell upon pleasures and diversions with other men? She was aware, as we know, that she had no longer the power to attract men in the old easy fashion, but the heart of the female rake is a strange thing. It never abandons entirely the will-o'-the-wisp.

These speculations concerning her thoughts on that afternoon must occur to searching minds, but it is conceivable that nothing of the sort was in the brain of Jeanne. She was essentially the egotist-criminal—the kind that rarely looks far into the future. The criminal sees one thing only at a time. He concentrates; and in his supreme concentration he has a power akin to that elusive power which we call genius. Yes! He sees one thing only, but beholds it in a light so dazzling that all else is blotted out.

Everything ran its course that afternoon and evening according to plan. Gaudry remained at Jeanne's apartments, passing the hours of waiting, reading and sleeping. Indeed, the man was actually in a semi-dozze when he was wakened by the ringing of the bell that was the signal for his attack.

He roused himself and went down the stairs. Crouching in the shadow of the pavilion he saw Saint Pierre open the gate and advance towards the house. Jeanne lingered a little way in the

rear. As Saint Pierre came near the pavilion, Gaudry flung the contents of the phial full in the man's face.

Saint Pierre uttered a scream and ran forward, striking out with his hands at the enemy whom he believed to be close to him. Meantime, Gaudry had slipped from his hiding-place and had rushed into the street, contriving to get away without being seen by any person.

Jeanne Brécourt played her part well. She called for assistance and, weeping hysterically, helped the police to carry the wretched man to her rooms, where she at once fell upon his breast, sobbing, moaning, screaming.

"A terrible mistake must have been made," she declared over and over again. "Some wretch, mad for vengeance, must have flung the vitriol at Saint Pierre, believing it was another person!"

Saint Pierre himself formed this belief when he was sufficiently recovered to discuss the terrible episode. Throughout his convalescence he lay for hours holding the hand of the woman who had plotted his blindness, telling her that she was his guardian angel, and that no other woman would have stood by him as she had done in his helpless condition.

She was satisfied! She had gained, as she believed, a husband who would rely upon her for every movement of his existence; whom she could fondle or ill-treat as she chose.

Gaudry, however, was the one vexatious element in her thoughts. She was not sure of the man. She knew him to be an emotional, stupid fellow, who might in a moment of rashness do some desperate thing that would shatter

her schemes. She therefore set herself to maintain her hold on the man. She met him more than once in obscure places. On one occasion, the meeting took place in a cemetery. That meeting was observed by a police-agent; and at a later time it formed a link in the chain of evidence that led to her arrest.

For the police had not been altogether satisfied regarding the version of the attack which Jeanne had furnished. At that time M. Macé, who afterwards became one of the most celebrated of the Secret Police, was a mere Commissary, but his acute brain had begun to think furiously. He asked himself why the woman had allowed her lover to go on in front of her on the night of the vitriol-throwing. Two people, the best of friends, returning from an entertainment, usually enter a house together, reasoned M. Macé. But a woman who *knew* that an attack was contemplated would naturally take care to remain well in the background.

Now here was a very slender clue, but Macé proceeded to work upon it. A rigid watch was kept upon the movements of Jeanne Brécourt. After the meeting in the cemetery, Gaudry was "shadowed", and quite soon the police discovered that the man had been associated with Brécourt for many years.

The authorities were encouraged in their investigations by the family of the injured man. For some time they had been aware of the liaison. More than one member had (intuitively, perhaps) formed a theory that the vitriol-throwing had been wholly or partly instigated by the woman herself.

Macé, evidently impressed by this theory, guided also by the mysteriousness of the secret meetings with Gaudry, decided to pay a visit to Jeanne's apartments in company with an examining-magistrate.

Jeanne received the official with perfectly assumed astonishment. Why had they come, she asked indignantly. Had scandalmongers been at work, hinting that she was carrying on an immoral life for profit? If this were so, then she was prepared to make them pay heavily for their gossip. She went on to assume that other suspicions were in the minds of the police, cleverly hinting at every suspicion except the true theory.

Macé evidently formed the opinion that the belief of the family concerning what happened on the night of the vitriol-throwing was well-founded. He continued to keep a rigid watch over the movements of the woman, and eventually applied for a warrant for her arrest. In the meantime she had gone to Courbevoie, near Paris, with her lover, who had entirely lost the sight of one eye, and the partial use of the other.

Arrests in France are frequently made on evidence which would hardly be held sufficient in this country. One imagines that Scotland Yard would hardly have taken a step of the kind on the mere fact of certain mysterious meetings and a theory formed by a resentful family. In this case, however, the precipitancy of the move proved more than justified.

Immediately after the arrest the rooms of Jeanne Brécourt were searched. The search



brought to light many strange things. Letters from all sorts and conditions of men—letters glowing with the most intense passion; letters denouncing her as the vilest thing in France; letters containing obscenities which shocked even the officers, who were probably accustomed to queer correspondence.

A half-burned package of letters from Saint Pierre was also found. Soon after the vitriol episode, whilst he was lying in bed at her rooms, Saint Pierre had begged her to burn these letters, because they held certain confessions which he dreaded being revealed at some later time when both he and herself might be dead. She had thrown the package on the fire to satisfy him, but had retrieved it immediately afterwards. Why? The answer was sufficiently obvious. The letters would form an excellent weapon for blackmail if her power over him in the future waned.

When Saint Pierre was informed of the arrest of his mistress he fell into an agony of despair, and shed tears for a long time. He said that a terrible injustice had been done; that she was the purest and kindest woman in the world. Macé then showed him the results of the search. The long catalogue of wickedness was unfolded to Saint Pierre, and he realized the truth. His saint, his vestal virgin, was a callous and shameful courtesan who, from her earliest years, had victimized men and wrung them dry, robbing them not only of money but of life itself.

Meantime, Jeanne had been taken to the St. Lazare prison, and here she made a false step. For, being anxious to communicate with Gaudry and to warn him to keep silence, she was rash

enough to send him a letter by means of a woman convict who was being discharged from the gaol. This woman showed the note to her lover who, scenting a reward, at once handed it to the police. Gaudry was immediately arrested, and his identity with the mysterious person in the cemetery was proved beyond all question.

The authorities probably perceived that in Gaudry they had an easier task than in Jeanne, for quite soon they had extracted from him a full confession. A few threats, a little bullying, and the weak-minded dupe told them all he knew. He exonerated himself by saying that he had been madly in love with the woman, and that he acted like a sleep-walker, scarcely knowing what he did. Of such stuff is such love made in Paris and everywhere in the world! Based entirely on a bodily impulse, it cracks at the first blow. A chain, we are told, is as strong only as its weakest link. An animal passion is as strong only as its most vital moment of desire.

On May 12th, 1877, Jeanne was brought face to face with her accomplice, who again told his story of the crime. She repudiated the accusation with furious rage, calling Gaudry by the vilest names in her lengthy list of invectives. He refused to withdraw a syllable of the confession, saying over and over again that he was the victim of a temptation which he found irresistible.

"What would you have?" he repeated. "A man who is violently in love with a woman is as a child in her hands. If she had told me to kill myself, I would have done it instantly. Honestly I believed that this M. de Saint Pierre

had treated her very badly. Surely I was justified in aiding her vengeance?"

The trial of this sordid pair was fixed to take place on July 23rd, 1877, at the Paris Assize Court. It dragged its slow length along for three days, during which time the court was filled with sensation-hunters of all classes, several famous novelists being among the spectators.

Jeanne was defended by M. Lachaud, a very noted counsel. Gaudry's advocate was M. Demange, who at that time was earning a reputation in the Criminal Courts by appealing to the susceptibilities of emotional jurymen. It was said of him that he could shed real tears whenever he chose, and it is probable that this gift helped to bring about a number of acquittals.

Throughout the trial sympathy was shown with the man Gaudry. Evidently the court and the spectators held that he was the victim rather than the "villain of the piece". The view to some extent was justified. There is no doubt that Gaudry at the outset of his association with Jeanne was a decent fellow; generous, good-natured, impressionable. His tragedy lay in the fact that the primordial instinct of man wrought in him more strongly than in the average creature.

When giving evidence in his defence (a privilege that has always been a feature of French criminal trials) Gaudry presented a pitiful rather than a heroic figure. Not for a moment did he attempt to shield his mistress. The fault, he said again, was entirely hers; he had merely been a tool in a stronger hand.

Throughout his evidence he was interrupted from time to time by the woman. "Lies, all lies!" she would scream, clenching her fists, darting at him glances of hate. "Beast! Pig! Coward!"—these were some of the epithets hurled at him, nor was any serious attempt made by the officials to curb her eloquence. The French are an emotional people, and their trials are (or were) conducted on lines which would astonish a person accustomed to the good-natured but restrained methods of our own courts.

Each counsel worked well for his client. Each endeavoured to shift the responsibility for the crime. M. Lachaud tried to prove that Gaudry was the real criminal; that, rendered desperate by jealousy of his rival, he had planned to take vengeance on Saint Pierre by destroying his sight.

On the other hand, Demange represented Gaudry as a simple-hearted gentle creature, entirely under the control of a pitiless woman, fascinated as a dove is fascinated by a serpent. Under such an influence, pleaded the counsel, a man might do things from which he would shrink with horror in normal conditions.

Throughout the trial many persons held that Gaudry would be acquitted on the ground of extenuating circumstances, but in the result this optimistic view was not justified. The jury found both prisoners guilty. The woman was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, Gaudry being condemned to the comparatively small penalty of five years'. The subsequent history of both has not been recorded, or, if such record has been preserved, it has not been available to

persons outside the circle of French police organizations.

This, then, is the record of the crime of Jeanne Amenaide Brécourt. If we study every outstanding chord of her life we shall perceive the dominant note in its fierce music.

Egotism! It wrought with her from the beginning. From the hour when a tiny child she destroyed a frock because it annoyed her sense of what was due to herself, to the hour when she planned for her lover a trap that was to hold him in eternal darkness, she was the complete self-lover. She saw life only in relation to her own ends.

Moreover, she was unimaginative, as criminals of a certain type always are unimaginative. They do not, they cannot, picture the sufferings of their victims, because the imagination is stifled by the fumes of self-interest. The philosophic, imaginative criminal of the "Macbeth" type is extremely rare.

The criminal has an inordinate opinion of himself. He hates whatever and whomsoever stands between his desire and its accomplishment. That is why pity is to him an unknown quantity. One can hardly pity what one hates.

Jeanne Brécourt was, no doubt, a self-deceiver. She fancied that she hated men because they had seemed to her mere opportunists obsessed by physical needs; but it is conceivable that she would have set out to exploit them had they been saints instead of sinners. No man can know himself in his entirety; the criminal, perhaps, least of all. He deceives himself as grossly as he deceives his victims!

It would be unjust, perhaps, to the memory of this amazing woman if her record were closed without a reference to a certain feature in her character entirely out of harmony with the other features. There was a young sister (to whom no reference has been hitherto made, for she is not relevant to the story) to whom Jeanne was sincerely and passionately devoted. For this sister she held no sacrifice too great—it is possible she was the only living thing that she honestly loved. Let her history close with this remembrance of that soul of goodness in things evil which is, perhaps, our only hope for an erring and mad humanity!



GREGORY RASPUTIN

1873 (?) - 1916





## GREGORY RASPUTIN

1873 (?)–1916

IN this study of a rogue, a charlatan, a sensualist, and a bully, the writer makes no attempt to deal in detail with the intricate political situation that formed the background of Gregory Rasputin's later activities. That the situation must force itself into the narrative for a few moments is, of course, inevitable, but the extent (if any) to which Rasputin influenced the march of events is a matter that must be left to the historian.

Gregory (Grishka) Rasputin began life as a peasant in the village of Pokrovsky in Tobolsk, Siberia. Like his father, he was a fisherman. Like his father he was from earliest youth a thief, a drunkard, a seducer of women. Indeed, the word "Rasputin" was merely a sort of generic nickname. It signifies "ne'er-do-well", "rotter", "scapegrace". The family name was "Novikh". Students of heredity will welcome the fact that the nickname was borne by the father and afterwards handed on to the son.

To the end of his life Gregory was an illiterate peasant, bare of the most elementary education, scarcely able to do more than scrawl a few illegible and ill-spelled words. He traded, however, on

this illiteracy, and proclaimed with blasphemous assurance that Christ himself was not able to write his own name. He sometimes hinted that his lack of worldly education had enhanced his spiritual powers!

Russia has always been a land of wandering "holy men"—usually charlatans, thieves, and beggars. Many of these "fakirs" pretend to powers of magic. They work alleged miracles, trading on the monumental ignorance and superstition of the half-savage peasantry. A conjuring trick which would be laughingly and contemptuously seen through by a British schoolboy of twelve is often the means of persuading a "muzkik" that the performer is possessed of satanic or Divine gifts.

Quite early in youth Gregory came to the conclusion that the work of a fisherman was too arduous, required too much patience. He soon abandoned this occupation for the more remunerative and more interesting trade of wandering "holy man".

The vagabond life appealed to his instincts. It brought him into contact with all sorts of potential dupes, men and women. To the end of his career this ingenious scoundrel invariably directed his powers towards the subjugation of that sex. "Get the women," was his favourite aphorism—"the men will always follow." In later years, he pursued this policy at the Imperial Court with consequences which are now a thing of history.

Rasputin married whilst a very young man, and produced a small family. There is so little to be said in his favour that it would be unfair to

him to leave unrecorded the fact that he invariably treated his wife and children with some kind of good nature. Little is known regarding the woman, save that she was of peasant family and was a simple, warm-hearted creature. Very soon she discovered that no fidelity was to be expected from her husband, and apparently she resigned herself to the situation with the fatalism which is the weakness of the Slavonic character.

In addition to the isolated "holy men" each performing alleged miracles, there are many sects of religious impostors with some kind of organization. These sects are frequently mere masks for villainies of all sorts, or for orgies of sensual crimes. Gregory Rasputin probably attached himself to one of the former sects, and very speedily showed himself a brilliant member.

It is a remarkable thing that the average person invariably regards Rasputin as a monk of some rigid order, who emerged from his monastery after many years of holy life to take a part in a political debacle. As a matter of fact, his claims to a monastic life were based on a few desultory visits to a disreputable monastery, where his associates were probably as sordid sinners as himself.

After joining a certain sect he began his pilgrimage from village to village, collecting money, food, and what Mr. Wemmick would have called "portable property". All offerings, whether jewels or food, were greedily snatched. Having amassed a considerable sum, ostensibly for the furtherance of holy works, he spent the money on the erection of a large house in his own village. Here he entertained very largely, welcoming

everybody, but especially young and attractive women.

Three rooms in this building were reserved for his wife and children. The remaining eleven apartments were devoted to himself and to a number of young women euphemistically called "disciples". In this house orgies were held reminiscent of Rome in her worst decadence.

The orgies usually held some kind of mystical significance or pretence. Like the majority of sensuous persons trained in primitive surroundings, Rasputin was highly sensitive to any form of mysticism that flattered the senses.

That his religious fervour was sincere enough in the early years is more than probable. Had he been a mere specious impostor, playing a part with tongue in cheek, he could not have achieved his extraordinary success. At a later stage, however, as was perhaps inevitable in the case of a man essentially cunning and avaricious, he became a cold-blooded mummer, to whom the playing of his part with a sort of conviction was a mere trick of practice and skill.

Not content with his "disciples", Gregory Rasputin would seek girls outside the walls of his retreat. So rapacious was his animal appetite that he frequently came in contact with fathers and brothers who gave him liberal doses of corporal punishment. So far from quelling him, these beatings apparently stimulated the desires.

Presently he began to gain a reputation that extended far beyond the limits of the village. He was said to be a miracle-worker and a prophet of no ordinary powers. Women of high rank travelled to the Siberian village to test his powers.

At this point, Gregory Rasputin probably began to weary of the narrow boundaries of his native place. He removed to Tjumen, sixty miles distant, and having taken a large house in which he re-established his devotees, continued his work of prophecy and faith-healing.

The women of the great world were as susceptible to his influence as the peasants of Tobolsk. His first step was to impress upon every young and attractive woman that salvation was to be gained only by yielding to him at every point. Then the loathsome trader in salvation would reel off his specious arguments. This flesh of ours, he would explain, was given us by the Creator as a means of glorifying Him. Only by yielding to the impulses of the flesh could that glorification be emphasized. And so on and so on, with all the sophistries and plausible falsehoods which are the stock-in-trade of the religious seducer, no matter his creed, race, or environment.

His attitude towards women was invariably that of the despot. He did not woo—he commanded. “You will come to me on a certain day at a certain hour,” the ragged, unshaven, ill-odorous fellow would say, and very rarely did the assignation fail.

His talk was invariably concerned with religion, mysticism, and sexual matters. He loved to find an everlasting blending of these concerns. One of his favourite “doctrines” took the form of a theory (always impressed upon his devotees) that woman could only fulfil a Divine mission by affording physical delight to man! He pointed out that the sin lay in the discovery of the act,

not in its commission. One cannot help thinking that had Rasputin survived the Revolution he would have proved a very apt teacher in the Soviet Sunday Schools.

A large section of his immoralities can only be hinted at in this volume. That he was a Sadist of the vilest type cannot be doubted. Flagellations formed an essential part of the rites performed in the various houses where his devotees and dupes gathered. Rasputin, beginning his career with mere normal vices, presently came to the point when cruelty was essential to his satisfaction. It is said that he actually invented a new weapon of flagellation, destined to inflict special suffering. He loved to humiliate women. Their screams and moans became at last a vital part of his enjoyment. . . .

The narrow limits of Tjumen did not satisfy Gregory for any length of time. Ambitious, greedy of power, he reflected that only in Petrograd could he find a scope worthy of his gifts. Eventually, he removed himself and his entourage to that city. Almost immediately he found a rich and influential friend in an early devotee—a Madame Bachmakof, member of an ancient and distinguished family. She rented and furnished an expensive flat for the “prophet”, and here Rasputin entered on his new phase.

From the beginning he was successful. His marvellous achievements were freely advertised by Bachmakof and other disciples; crowds came daily to the house. On occasions, more than 400 women passed the threshold in a single day!

Rasputin, whether as visionary, magician, conjuror, palmist, lover, satisfied them all. An

expert judge of character, the man knew exactly how to treat each client. He employed sentiment with one, eroticism with another, religion with a third, miracles with a fourth, and in all probability a certain magnetic power with all.

His eyes were the cold grey eyes of the hypnotist, the pupils contracting and expanding at will. The ex-monk was in the habit of making great play with these organs. Many women recorded their sensations of complete surrender and loss of will-power whilst in his presence, and even when they were at a huge distance.

One woman wrote: "I cannot determine whether Father Gregory is a holy man or the greatest sinner in all the world." (One would imagine there could hardly have been much doubt on this point.) She went on: "I am afraid, yes, terribly afraid of Rasputin. Oh, how those eyes of his cow me, frighten me, penetrate to the very deepest places of my soul! Even at a distance of 5,000 versts I feel him close to me. He seems to me at times an angel, and at other times an evil force, capable of anything in the world."

In spite of his local triumphs and successes, it is highly probable that the name of Rasputin would never have penetrated the boundaries of his own land but for a certain domestic circumstance at the Imperial Court. History, one imagines, would have had no single word to write concerning him had not his appearance in Petrograd and the publication of his alleged magic coincided with the disappointment of the young Empress concerning the son whom she imagined she was about to give to her husband and throne.

For years, daughters had come to the Empress,



but no heir had appeared. Then, for some occult reason, the Czarina formed the belief that she was about to give birth to a boy. There was no physical basis for this belief, but it lingered in her brain with illogical persistence.

Nothing of the kind happened. The Czarina fell into a state of gloom, and this gloom was emphasized by the unpleasant nature of her position. On her marriage, she had become a convert to the Pravoslavny Church, the most powerful and tyrannical instrument of government in old Russia. The Church, however, viewed her conversion with suspicion, and Alexandra was never a *persona grata* with its dignitaries. Moreover, she had to occupy a very inferior position in relation to the Dowager Empress. The latter took precedence of the Czarina at all times. Indeed, so few official duties were allotted to the young Empress that several had to be invented in order that time might not hang too heavily on her hands!

In these circumstances, one can hardly be astonished by the fact that Alexandra, a young woman with a decidedly religious bias, took refuge in solitude and devotion. Had her consolations been confined to legitimate religion, all would doubtless have been well. But the more immediate solace of magic was at hand, and Alexandra turned to it with delight.

The subtle and cunning Rasputin had formed his first plan of attack. Armed with a letter of introduction from a Bishop of the Pravoslavny Church, he came to the Palace of Tsarkoe-Selo. The letter described Gregory as a holy man possessed of very great powers.

From the moment of their first meeting the Czarina formed a huge attachment for the ragged worker of miracles. Scandalmongers have suggested that at a later time their association was not without certain erotic features, but there is not the slightest evidence to support this theory. Throughout her comparatively short life this woman was a perfect mother and a loyal wife. She was called an "angel of goodness", even by those persons who had no manner of liking for her. However, there is some excuse for the scandalmakers, for it rarely happened that Rasputin did not smirch a woman with whom he came in close or even casual contact.

The ex-monk got to work immediately. Without any preamble he told the empress that he could help her to gain her desire to give birth to a son. The Divine Voice had whispered to him that she was to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Seraphim and there to offer up prayers. It was impossible, he assured her, that such petitions could fail.

This was in the month of August, 1903. The Empress carried out the instruction and journeyed to the shrine. Exactly one year later the infant Czarewitch was born!

This initial scheme having succeeded so admirably, Rasputin did not fail to follow up the excellent impression he had produced not only on the feeble brains of Czar and Czarina but on many of their entourage.

He was never weary of impressing on the young mother that the welfare of the child and the welfare of him who had predicted its birth were indissolubly bound together.

"Remember this," Rasputin would say. "That if harm comes to me, then most certainly harm will come also to the child!"

Rasputin was anxious to establish himself firmly at the Palace, to have an unquestionable right to come and go as he chose; to dominate everybody from the Emperor and Empress down to the humblest official. To that end he decided to make himself apparently indispensable to the health of the young Czarewitch. He pointed out that any absence on his part might react on the child's welfare.

Nor was this a mere boast. For it happened that whenever Rasputin, enraged by some real or imaginary slight, quitted the Palace, the child was seized with illness. On one occasion when the charlatan had sulked and remained away for several weeks, the Czar himself sought him out and begged him to return so that the boy might recover.

By this time both Majesties were convinced that Rasputin possessed no ordinary powers. Their belief might have undergone a certain abrupt modification had they known what really happened in the Royal nursery.

For the entire business was "faked", to use a familiar word that exactly covers the situation. Rasputin had contrived to fascinate and subjugate a Madame Viruboya, a lady-in-waiting. The apartments of this woman adjoined the nursery. Here, in conjunction with a herb-doctor also in the pay of Rasputin, she manœuvred small illnesses. For instance, on one occasion the unfortunate child was made violently sick. The attacks of nausea continued for several

days, ceasing, of course, when Rasputin arrived.

Not content with this exhibition of his supposed powers, Rasputin actually planned a prophetic "coup" in connection with the little boy. One afternoon, whilst chatting with the father and mother in a room in the Palace, the ex-monk suddenly paused, covered his eyes, and uttered a low cry of horror.

"Look! Look!" he cried. "I see a terrible danger about to fall upon the child!"

He rushed to the billiard-room, followed by the frantic father and mother. The little boy was at the table, making baby attempts to strike a ball. Rasputin caught him in his arms, whirling him away. Immediately afterwards a portion of the ceiling fell with a tremendous crash on the spot where the child had stood.

Here was another miracle, another proof that Gregory Rasputin was possessed of powers far-reaching and prophetic! The explanation, of course, was that the ceiling of the billiard-room had been artfully engineered, and that at the dramatic moment the assiduous Madame Viruboya had agitated the lever which brought about the supposed accident.

The months and years in their passage held many episodes of this kind, and each episode strengthened the hold of the artful charlatan over his Imperial dupes. Rasputin could do no wrong. Czar and Czarina came to regard the peasant from Tobolsk as a divine agent whom it would be blasphemous to reject. That Rasputin was aided in his frauds by his superficial resemblance to certain traditional pictures of the

Christ, we cannot doubt. The impostor lived up to this trivial outward likeness by means of various devices.

The fame of the man rushed to every corner of the Empire. He was regarded as a wonder-worker, a holy man, and some indeed said that he was a reincarnation of the Saviour. There came the day when he was without doubt the most powerful personage in Russia.

Rasputin played the part of the beggar-on-horseback to perfection. Made drunk with a power as absolute as the power of the Czar himself, he played with statesmen, politicians, generals, bishops, as with a set of skittles. He made the fortunes of the persons whom he liked, persons who had chanced to pander to some vanity or vice. He ruined men who had caused him a moment's displeasure or disappointment.

Avarice, always one of his chief sins, now got a hold upon him, and he made huge sums by selling offices to the highest bidders. During the War he amassed wealth by selling exemptions from military service. He gathered in moneys and jewels from his female devotees, and proved himself *souteneur* as well as a dozen other vile things.

From the first, of course, the Czar had been an easy dupe. Superstition was as an essential part of that wretched ruler's mental make-up as the very cells of his brain. Night after night spiritualistic séances were held at the Palace at Tsarkoe-Selo. These séances, like the other manifestations, were entirely "faked". Rasputin and his colleagues arranged that the astrals of departed great Russians should appear on

occasions and furnish advice in accordance with the charlatan's schemes.

Throughout his life at the Court Rasputin retained the filthy manners of the peasant. He rarely bathed, and his long hair hung matted and uncombed over his dirty shirt. His finger-nails were allowed to grow long, and his table manners were revolting. He would eat with his fingers, sometimes calling upon some woman devotee to lick them as a sign of devotion!

He loved to insult people for the mere pleasure of giving pain. His insolence swelled to such a height that he would submit to reproof from none but the Czar or Czarina. When the lesser royalties endeavoured to curb his offensive tendencies, he would turn upon them furiously and load them with abuse. Confident that he could invariably rely upon the support of his chief patrons, he snapped his grimy fingers at subordinate authority. Once, when a guardsman of high rank, enraged by some brutal insult, gave the ex-monk a well-merited thrashing, the officer was severely reprimanded by the Emperor himself and immediately dismissed from the Service. So obsessed were Czar and Czarina by the supposed saint-like virtues of Rasputin that they resented a snub to that holy person as they might have resented a snub offered to themselves. It would be safe to say that in all the history of Courts no man has gained so complete an ascendancy over his Royal patrons as Gregory Rasputin gained during those disastrous years at the Tsarko-Selo Palace.

Rasputin was always in the limelight. A nummer to the very core of him, he could not

endure obscurity even for an hour. It sometimes happened that owing to the presence of some sensational guest visiting Petrograd for the first time, the ex-monk was for a few minutes overlooked by the Royal hosts. Instantly he would make known his presence by picking a quarrel with the first convenient person. The Czar or Czarina would hurry to the spot to defend the favourite, and Rasputin, gratified and triumphant, would magnanimously pardon his opponent.

The palace drawing-room was not respected by him when pretty women were concerned. On many occasions he made open love to those unfortunate young ladies who chanced to attract him. Once, he molested a girl so aggressively that she struck him in the face. The arrival of the Czarina averted the "scene" which would have followed. The girl was not invited again! She had committed an act of sacrilege in daring to strike the cheek of the saint!

So intoxicated was Rasputin with self-confidence that he would frequently make violent love to a woman whose husband was in the same room. "Your husband is nothing," he would tell her. "Nor do your vows weigh in the sight of God—weigh aught when compared with the service to religion which you can render by complete submission to my will." One imagines that Rasputin brought blasphemy to the level of a profound art!

Even this monster, however, had his lighter moods—his moments when he would perform some act of kindness, providing that it involved him in no trouble. So gross was his temperament, nevertheless, that even when undertaking these

rare decencies he took care to smirch them with some coarse brutality. For instance, a certain lady, the mother of a young Cossack officer called on him during the early months of the War to ask a favour for her son. On seeing the visitor in the room, he greeted her with these words:

"Be off, you big ——! You neglect me long enough, and now you come, asking for some favour, I'll swear!"

The poor woman murmured apologies, and having sufficiently humbled herself proceeded to beg for his assistance. Rasputin grinned, took up a pen, and having flung some further abuse at the trembling creature, scrawled on a sheet of paper a message, that ran thus:

To General ——. Do what this woman wants.  
GREGORY.

Another lady of very high rank who sought his assistance in connection with the transfer of her son to a certain regiment was made to go down upon her knees and lace the boots of the "saint". Even then he was not satisfied. "I would not give a kopeck for you as a servant," he growled, and then, smacking her face playfully, proceeded to write out the order.

Perhaps a great deal of this conduct was natural enough. The beggar-on-horseback is rarely a gentleman. A peasant flung into a palace, fawned upon by Royal persons, placed in possession of absolute power, is not likely to develop the courtesies of a Newcome. Rasputin was naturally and essentially a boor and a bully. His glittering



surroundings emphasized his tendencies and gave them scope.

More than one attempt was made to kill Rasputin, but the potential assassins were persons with private rather than political grievances. Several women whom he had brutally treated and eventually deserted sought to take his life. These attempts were rarely of an important character. Indeed, the sole serious attack, with the exception of the last, was made by a former disciple—a young woman who stabbed him whilst Rasputin was undergoing temporary exile in his village of Pokrofsky. Years had passed since their first encounter, and in the passage of them this girl had lived through tragedy. After encountering Rasputin several times in the streets, where he rebuffed her with his customary coarseness, she hid herself one night in a doorway, stabbing him as he passed. The wound was a serious one, but the vitality of the man was abnormal. He recovered after a few weeks in hospital.

The convalescence of Rasputin coincided with the outbreak of the European War. Immediately he decided to return to Petrograd. It is true that his banishment (brought about by that powerful instrument of governance, the Holy Synod) had not been officially cancelled, but it is conceivable that he imagined that the excitement and confusion of Wartime would afford a perfect opportunity for his return. Moreover, he was certain that the Czar and Czarina were still his friends.

Nor was he wrong. They welcomed him with delight. Automatically and smoothly Rasputin

stepped back into his former place of favourite and despot.

Always an opportunist, he found in the War his chance to utter impressive prophecies regarding the victory of the Allies and the downfall of the Central Powers. He flattered the Imperial dupes by foretelling the world-dominion of Russia. How this was to be brought about; how France and Britain were to be induced to occupy subordinate positions, he apparently made no attempt to explain.

It is related that at one time he actually proposed that he should assume the high command of the Russian forces. He admitted his ignorance of military affairs but pointed out that his occult powers would balance the deficiency. However, even the Czar was able to realize the lunacy of the proposal. He compromised by allowing Rasputin to advise on weighty matters of administration. The fellow appointed and dismissed commanders—undoubtedly he did a great deal to weaken the military situation.

The appointment of the notorious Stuermer was the act of Rasputin—an appointment which led to the horrors in Turkestan and the equally horrible reprisals. This incident was only one of a huge number, all marked with the brand of evil judgement and vain egotism run mad.

One cannot imagine, however, that Rasputin desired the triumph of the enemy. Treachery of the kind has been suggested, but apparently there is no evidence to support the view. The man was an egotist—the true criminal, faithful to type. He desired power for his exclusive use. Domination by Germany would not have suited

his plans. Nor is there any evidence that he contemplated the overthrow of Czardom and the institution of a revolutionary régime. He must have known that the realism of a Communistic order would prove as a stone wall against the attacks of his mystic rites.

Nevertheless, one cannot doubt that Rasputin played his part in the undermining of the forces of Empire by his general conduct. The bribery; the corruption; the appointing of futile and incompetent commanders and officials; the weakening of the characters of Czar and Czarina; all these things tended in one direction. Nothing but ruin could follow.

The Soviet Government has recently published a number of volumes dealing with the Revolution. A considerable space is given to Gregory Rasputin. One imagines that the astute compilers of those volumes would hardly have concerned themselves with the man, even to the extent of ten pages, had they not realized that indirectly his influence served their ends.

Between the autumn of the year 1914 and the winter of 1916, the last two years of his life, the ex-monk pursued his debaucheries. His crimes now touched their deeps. He invented new forms of satyrdom. His passion for flagellation and other unnatural horrors increased. More than one woman came near to dying by reason of wounds inflicted by this "holy" monster!

Meantime, a reaction had set in against him. The saint was losing his halo! Perhaps the realities of war woke the people from their illusions. Perhaps there is a time-limit to all charlataneries—a limit as rigid as the course of a

planet. On these matters it is difficult to dogmatize, but the fact emerges that not only in the entourage of the Court but throughout the nation, Rasputin was now regarded with fear and with hatred. Perhaps the people seeking a scapegoat in the hour of disaster found one in him! He knew it, of course, and began to take precautions. He rarely left his house unless urged by necessity. He was a coward after the fashion of the majority of men who live intensely in the senses. Throughout his life Rasputin avoided physical danger; he ran no risk of injury.

It is not easy to determine with any exactitude how the conspiracy that terminated with his assassination actually was inaugurated. When, at length, it crystallized into definite shape, it was dominated by three men. One of them was the Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovitch, a member of the Imperial family; the second was Prince Felix Yussopov, a man belonging to one of the oldest Russian houses; and the third was Puriskevitch, a member of the Right Party of the Duma. Puriskevitch, a man of high character, who did excellent work in the War in connection with transport and supplies.

The conspiracy was a slow affair. In Russia in the days of Czardom, assassinations were usually heralded by orgies of discussion. The Slav character loves to talk, loves to analyse motives. For some time the removal of Rasputin belonged rather to the region of academic argument than actual practice.

At length matters took shape. The conspirators recognized that Russia was in extreme peril, and that whilst Rasputin lived and wrought,

there was at work a poisonous, a corroding influence which might easily convert peril into actual defeat.

The palace of the Yussopovs was the place chosen for the killing of the ex-monk. A supper-party was arranged for the evening of Friday, December 16th, 1916. It was planned that Rasputin should be invited to the house after supper on the understanding that he would meet there the young and pretty wife of a certain officer. The conspirators were sufficiently good judges of his character to recognize that here was a bait which would be swiftly followed. Rasputin might dread leaving the safety of his house, but he could not resist the chance to meet a woman whom he coveted. The fact that he invariably possessed a number of adoring devotees rarely held him back from seeking a new convert.

Pale and trembling, the conspirators sat down to supper, eating little, but drinking in large quantities. The killing of a man in cold blood, even though he be an epitome of all the evil of the world, must always be a difficult matter for men unused to murder. That the supper-party drank more than was good for them is amply proved by the fashion in which the killing of Rasputin was accomplished. It was bungled, and very nearly missed its mark.

After the meal lots were immediately drawn to decide who should fire the shot. A member of the Imperial house drew the marked paper. He shook his head, went very pale, and said that his religion forbade him to take human life. Thereupon the Grand Duke Dmitri turned upon him with an oath and cursed him for a coward.

Eventually, the idea of shooting the condemned man was abandoned. Cyanide of potassium was placed in certain cakes and wine. This having been done, one of the conspirators drove in a car to Rasputin's house and brought him to the Palace.

One asks oneself how Rasputin could have entered the trap with such confidence. He was well aware of the perils that constantly awaited him. Only one explanation presents itself. He was obsessed by his amorous urge. The primordial instinct overcame the instinct of self-preservation.

He entered the room on the ground floor in jaunty manner, asking immediately for the lady. He was told that she was in the drawing-room on the upper floor with the other guests. Yussopov, having said this, immediately handed the ex-monk a dish containing the poisoned cakes.

Rasputin refused at first, but after a moment ate several cakes and drank a small quantity of wine. He continued to chat gaily. He showed no sign of indisposition.

The minutes passed. Nothing happened. Yussopov, ignorant of the fact that cyanide of potassium does not possess the immediate effects of certain vegetable poisons such as prussic acid, was immediately plunged into a state of terror. Was this man, after all, a magician, he wondered? Had he found the elixir that would hold him safe against a dozen attacks?

He waited. Still nothing happened. Then, terrified, fearing that the man might still escape his murderers, he fled upstairs.

"The fellow is in league with Satan," he

exclaimed. "The poison has not harmed him. He is alive, strong as ever!"

A revolver was thrust into his hand. He went downstairs. By this time, however, the poison was manifesting itself. Rasputin was very pale. He was retching, coughing. He said that the wine had upset him, but made no suggestion that it had been tampered with.

"Come! Don't be anxious! It is nothing! You will be better soon," said Yussopov. Then he called the attention of Rasputin to an ivory miniature of Christ on the mantelpiece. The charlatan turned his back to look at the miniature. The instant he turned Yussopov fired two shots into the ex-monk. He fell immediately, and apparently died after a moment's agony.

Yussopov rushed upstairs, crying out: "The beast is dead! The beast is dead!" The conspirators, hysterical after the long tension of waiting, danced, sang, shouted with joy.

"The beast is dead!" they cried over and over again, finding in those words an outlet for their passionate satisfaction.

But they had misjudged the vitality of their man. Suddenly steps were heard on the landing below. They flew to the banisters. Then they saw Rasputin, covered with blood, putting on his shoes, and stumbling towards the street-door. He was moving with apparent strength, but with the steps of a drunken man.

He made frantic efforts to win to the street-door, but the conspirators were already on his heels. They poured bullets into his body, and as he fell they clubbed his head with their heavy boots. Their fury was terrific. It is

clear that they feared that even then he might escape.

At 2.0 a.m. the body was placed in a car and was driven to the Petrovsky Bridge. Some life still lingered in the mangled flesh, for even as they raised the supposed corpse to fling it in the river, a finger and thumb curled round an epaulette on the shoulder of an officer and tore it away. That was Rasputin's last gesture!

The body dropped from the bridge, crashed against a pier. Then it glanced off, struck the ice, and was gathered in by the strong tide.

"The beast is dead!"

Throughout Russia the killing of Gregory Rasputin was greeted with satisfaction. On the evening that followed the murder the audiences in the theatres insisted on the orchestras playing the National Anthem to celebrate the event.

The Czar and the Czarina were, of course, horrified. The chief conspirators, who made no attempt to conceal their association with the affair, were placed under arrest. However, so strong was national feeling in favour of the conspirators, that the Emperor, although passionately implored by his wife to take summary vengeance, could not bring himself to do more than order a perfunctory trial. After some formalities the court decided that the murderers had killed the ex-monk in "self-defence". This verdict gave them a pretext for an acquittal, but in view of the fact that Rasputin was one man against seven or eight, the plea was, of course, quite farcical. However, it served its turn, and the nation was satisfied.

That this peasant—ignorant, uncouth, dirty,



lustful, brutal—could have risen to so great a height and retained his power throughout so extended a time must remain one of the most inscrutable problems of modern history, if it be judged from a purely material standpoint.

More than one theory has been put forward to explain the phenomenon. The hypnotic theory certainly holds a certain weight, but it does not entirely cover the complete issue. Even the most gifted hypnotist could hardly have maintained his sway unbroken throughout a space of thirteen years.

It must be remembered, moreover, that Rasputin was not the first charlatan possessed of real or imaginary powers who came into close contact with the Imperial Court. Long before his arrival many clever rogues had done their best to win the favour of the Emperor and his wife, but none gained more than a passing hold.

It has been suggested by certain writers that Gregory Rasputin was merely an ingenious schemer, who gained his ascendancy over a father and mother by reason of his protection of their child. These writers point out that Rasputin, having worked a supposed miracle in foretelling the birth of the Czarewitch, proceeded to build upon his luck, and that afterwards the power automatically developed. But one cannot help thinking that even the most grateful parents could hardly have preserved their gratitude white-hot for thirteen crowded and anxious years.

No! One must look for another explanation—an explanation which the writer puts forward with a certain diffidence in an age which is frankly materialistic and sceptical.

Rasputin in all probability *did* possess some occult power—a power which we may call supernatural because thus far it has not been classified and labelled.

The writer goes even further in the pursuit of his theory. He hazards the belief that the Immortals played a strange trick when Gregory Rasputin was born. For perhaps, if a few cells of the brain had been modified, this monster might have shown himself a new saviour of humanity. But it happened otherwise. Here was a man possessed of a certain occult power to which was added a variety of vile instincts. And thus, he who might have illumined his own and subsequent generations, takes his place among criminals, *souteneurs*, and satyrs.

Perhaps, however, all this is mere theory—futile, unsatisfactory. In the last reckoning man cannot be judged by man, nor can his deeds be set down as exclusively good or evil. The world's drama must be viewed as a whole; to linger on one scene is an act of childish folly.

Who shall decide? It is conceivable that all of them who have played their parts in this volume—Nero, Hopkins, Brinvilliers, Rasputin, and the others, were working out the scheme of the President of the Immortals, in Whose eyes there is neither black nor white, neither good nor evil, but some far-off event veiled from the dim eyes of undeveloped and unknowing mankind!

THE END

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